Malta and the Knights hospitallers

William Kirkpatrick Riland Bedford

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MALTA

AND THE KNIGHTS HOSPITALLERS

By the

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MALTA

I

EARLY HISTORY

When the traveller to the East has accomplished half of his Mediterranean voyage, which is generally on the fourth day after leaving Gibraltar, he enters the Malta channel, a stretch of sea between Sicily on the north, the snowy peak of Etna occasionally making itself visible, and on the south a rocky shore, which swells gradually up to hills of some 600 or 700 feet in height, without trees, and therefore presenting a heavy though undulating outline; about a third of its surface bare rock, and the other two-thirds partitioned off into small fields by enclosures of loose stones similar to those of Westmoreland or the North Riding. This is Gozo, and his eye will inform him that the country is productive and highly cultivated, even if another sense is not penetrated by the odour of garlic, the favourite green crop of the Gozo farmer. The fields in March are red with clover blossom; the orange groves are in flower or fruit all the year long, yet there is no vacuity or want of energy about the people. Passing the mouth of the strait of Comino where, upon the little island of the same name, the unlucky *Sultan* man of war was wrecked a few years ago, the steeper cliffs of the western coast-line of Malta come into view, in colour of a bright orange, and the eye can distinctly make out that great geological fault which traverses both islands, as Mr. Adams so happily says, "just as if Atlas had raised the entire island group to the level of the higher plateau, when a large portion in the middle gave way and sank, leaving the remainder of Malta south-eastward,

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and the west of Gozo, beyond Migiar Scini gorge, at much about the same levels." As the voyager passes the bay of St. Paul, now clearly identified with the Apostle's shipwreck, the coast-line becomes less interesting, nor is there anything in the whole face of the country which can be called imposing or picturesque until the harbour of Valletta comes into view. There are, however, hidden among these unprepossessing terraces remnants of prehistoric architecture, which so good an authority as Professor Sayce has pronounced superior to any others to be found in the Mediterranean, relics which the visitor to Malta ought not to pass by without notice.

Hagiar Kim—the stone of Veneration—is the most accessible and best preserved of these vestiges of hoary eld. We can only carry back its modern history to the excavation in the year 1839, when the soil and stones accumulated during centuries of neglect were first cleared away—with unfortunately hardly adequate precaution—nevertheless the seven statuettes of sandstone, preserved in the museum at Valletta, were found here—images which are identified with the Kabiri, worshipped in Lemnos as the ancient workers in metal—though these, "figures fat as Tunisian Jewesses, seated on the ground like Chinese *poussahs*," headless, but with holes and sockets which indicate that a nodding neck was fitted into the vacant place, have assuredly, as M. Darcel notes, more to do with Ceres than with Vulcan, with abundance and fertility than with subterranean toil. There is also preserved in the museum an altar, and the sacred slab ornamented with an egg-shaped figure between two volutes symbolising the Universe. Later excavations carried out by the Director of Education, Dr. Caruana, have developed the complete plan of the temple, and ascertained the mode of its construction. The gigantic slabs of stone employed in the external walls, and the traces of the oracular chamber, the enclosures for the animals used in sacrifice, and other details, plainly connect it with the Sidonian period of architecture and worship; and the discovery of a little image of Astarte (Astaroth) supplies a link of additional certainty.

It would seem that these builders arrived in the island from the south-east, landing at the Marsa Scirocco harbour, in immediate contiguity to which are the remains of a large temple, and also (which is a primary requirement in Malta) a huge excavation with its roof

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supported by large blocks of stone for the purpose of a water-tank, now empty but in good preservation. Here too was found, some time previous to 1694, the bilingual inscription, which is the clue to much of our knowledge of the Phœnician language, a Greek translation following the Sidonian letters. It was engraved in duplicate on the base of a pair of marble Cippi, of which one is in the museum at Valletta; an urn or balustrade-shaped stem is ornamented with a large palmated leaf, and in the entablature is incised the inscription

Kabiri in the Museum at Valietta.

in both languages, presumably of the same date. It reads thus: "A vow from Abdosir and his brother Osirschamar, sons of Osirschamar son of Abdosir, to my Lord Melkarte, Lord of Tyre, praying that he may bless them whenever he hears their words." In the Greek the names of Dionysus, Serapion, and Hercules, are substituted for Abdosir, Osirschamar, and Melkarte.

The same palmated foliage of ears symmetrically arranged, rising from a kind of basket with two handles, forms the principal ornament of the altar already referred to, a disk of stone supported

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by a small vase, decorated with pilasters at each angle, and in each face hollowed out into a niche; the whole of the smooth portions of the surface being riddled with punctures, as are many of the ordinary slabs and stones which compose the inner walls of the temples.

It may be conjectured that the immigrants selected Marsa Scirocco as their port, not only from its naturally presenting itself to the voyager from the east, but for its shelving shores, which allowed them to beach their galleys. A singular piece of evidence as to the subsidence of the island exists here. In the hard stone, tracks of wheels are found leading direct to the seashore and disappearing beneath the waves—in some instances at a considerable distance the same tracks reappear, and are an evident continuation of a well-frequented road once existing, now covered by the sea. With the exception of the two deep inlets of Valletta, the Marsa Scirocco and St. Paul's Bay, the island possesses no haven worthy of the name, the whole of the south and south-west portion of the coast being composed of abrupt, though not lofty, cliffs, their regular outline only broken by small chines hardly ample enough to hold a boat.

The southern side of the island appears to have had attractions for these settlers—while traces of their presence are not numerous on the north and north-eastern shores, a few foundations upon the Corradino heights near Valletta being sole indication. There is another large temple in good preservation scarce a quarter of a mile from Hagiar Kim, a strong testimony to the existence of a large population in the vicinity, and the whole of the range of eminences which rise on the southern and western shores, up to the very border of the grand fault—the abrupt fissure running in a north-westerly direction across both islands, Malta and Gozo—are honeycombed by caves, dwellings, and tombs dating from the period of Phœnician occupation. Beyond the straits and the little islet of Comino, indeed beyond the portion of Gozo affected by the fault, is one of the largest and finest of these temples, known familiarly as the Giant's Tower, which from its position in the side of a hill, admitting of its being shut off from the public, and from the care bestowed on its preservation by the owners, a cultured Maltese noble family, is not so much injured as its sister edifices. It is of the same general ground-plan—elliptical

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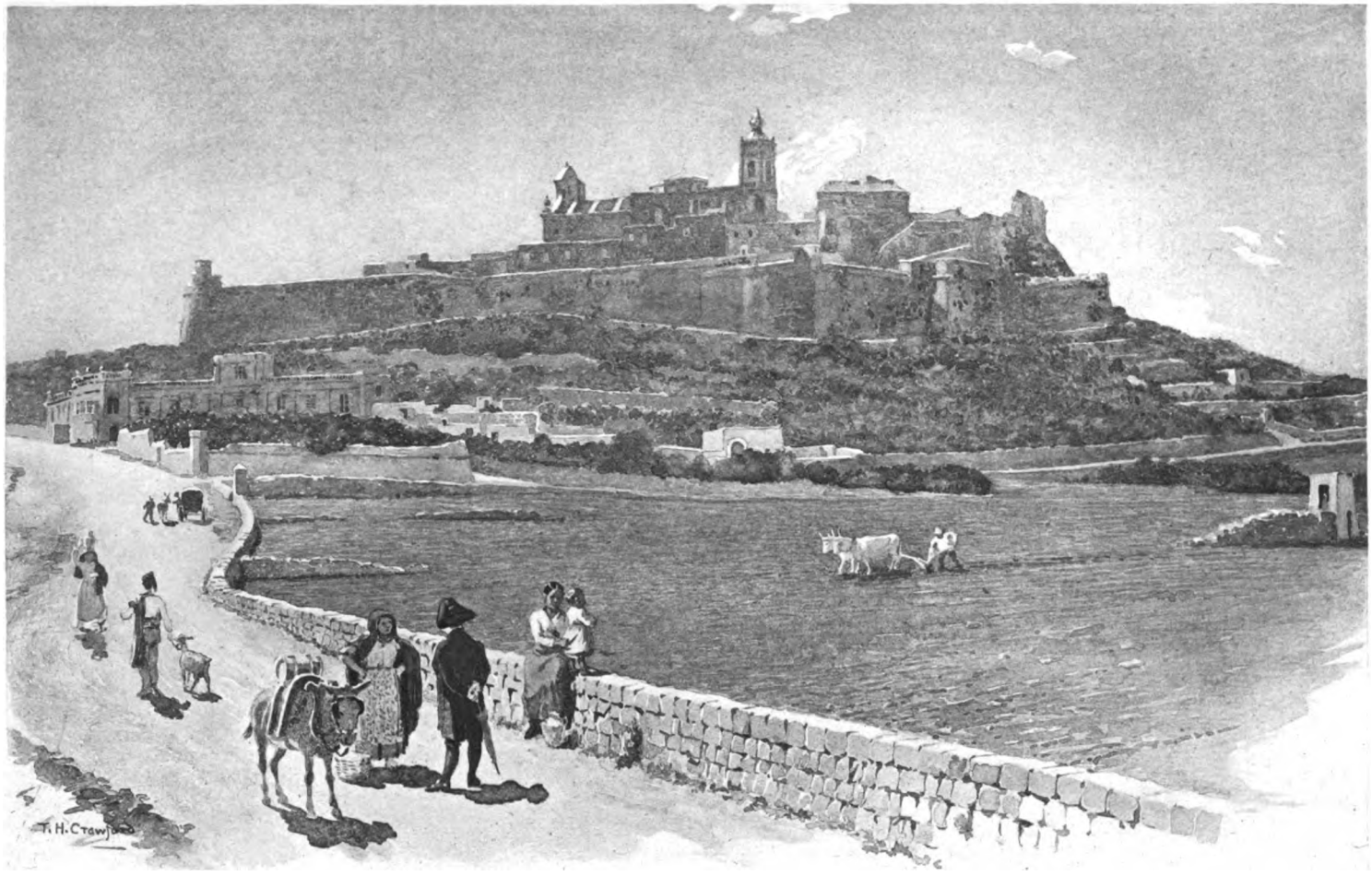

Walter L Colls Ph Sc

Rabato in the Island of Gozo.

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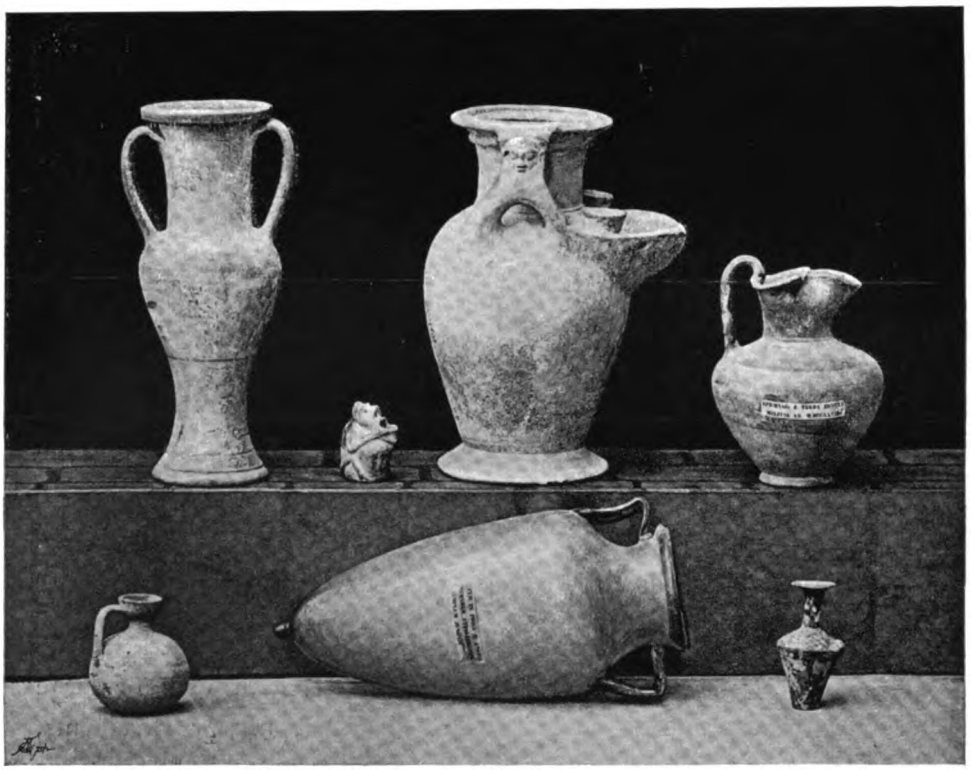
chambers in pairs, with apsidal chapels attached, being the invariable characteristic of all of them, the altar with its pitted surface and the doorposts pierced with square holes for bars, being likewise invariably present. A few flint knives, bones of animals, often calcined, and rude pottery, mostly broken, are all that can now be discovered on these sites. But their builders have left a much more permanent trace in



Phœnician Pottery in the Museum at Valietta.

the present population of the islands, who, especially at Gozo, in language, superstitions, and usages, preserve a strong Oriental bias, and are evidently distinct from every one of the various nations who subsequently to the Phœnician period have held in succession a temporary supremacy over them.

The Phœnicians are supposed to have been in the islands B.C. 1519; the Egyptians were there also, as the triad group of deities carved of the

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native stone, discovered in 1713, bears testimony, and in B.C. 736 the Greeks annexed the islands, and gave to the larger its name Melita. The Carthaginians expelled the Greeks, and at the conclusion of the struggle for supremacy between Carthage and Rome, Malta became a part of the extensive dominions of the latter power, and soon experienced the advantage of the rule of the great civilising empire. Its commerce was fostered, its industries stimulated, and it became a thriving mart. From various sources we learn that the islands were then wealthy, attractive, and adorned with many noble specimens of Roman architecture, but, as the Vandals seized them in 484 A.D., and from that time until about the end of the eleventh century they were a mere haunt of Arab and Saracen pirates, few relics of this period of peace and prosperity remain.

Thus the Roman remains a few years ago were comprised in two or three small statues of great beauty, such as the Romulus and Remus preserved in the museum, some glass and pottery in the same receptacle, and carved inscriptions and bas reliefs, there, and in private collections; but in 1881 a valuable discovery was made at the ancient capital Notabile, beneath the glacis of the fortifications. Some planting of an ornamental character was going on, when one of the labourers threw up with his spade a few squares of mosaic, which were fortunately noticed by a native ecclesiastic of learned and antiquarian tastes, who was passing by, and the matter having been brought to the notice of the Governor, a systematic excavation was commenced, which finally resulted in the disinterment of very considerable remains of a Roman villa of large dimensions and handsome ornamentation. Statues, mosaic pavements, and a large quantity of glass and pottery were brought to light, and are deposited in a kind of museum constructed within the house itself. Within a very few yards of the house is the entrance to the city, where, built into a niche in the wall, still stands a statue of Juno of Roman workmanship, and closer still is an early Christian monument, of which the original cross has been replaced by a modern one, displaying on the capital of its shaft the type of carving which connects the Roman period of art with the Byzantine. Near the cave of St. Paul, too, are catacombs which are probably Christian in their origin. Here, too, we find fragments of Norman architecture in the streets

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of the old town, that profoundly silent city which so impressed the author of the *Crescent and the Cross;* but, with the exception of a part of the castle of St. Angelo, nothing else remains of Roger of Sicily's work, unless it be a fine Norman capital, preserved in the museum, which was formerly part of a well in the Borgo, or old town, behind St. Angelo.

Egyptian Figure in the Museum at Valletta.

It is not improbable that when handed over by the Emperor Charles V. to the Order of St. John in 1530, the island of Malta was really at a lower pitch of decay than when Roger expelled the corsairs, the population of Malta being estimated at only 12,000 and that of Gozo at 5,000 souls, who were represented as being almost in a state of destitution. The wretched villages in which the inhabitants dwelt, termed casals, partook of the general air of poverty and misery which everywhere prevailed. That this was partly caused by the exposure of the island to the ravages of pirates is evident, but the neglected condition of the arboriculture, which could not but have an influence on the climate, had much to do with the poverty and want of food of which the natives complained. Such however was the impression of the sterility and hopeless indigence of Malta in 1530, that the Hospitallers, homeless though they were, and unable to persuade their patron, the Emperor, to give them possession of the city and port of Syracuse, which they, like Nelson afterwards, preferred to Malta, would probably have found some plausible reason for declining what seemed to them at best

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a questionable boon, if L'Isle Adam, and some of the more far-sighted and enterprising of the naval commanders, had not recognised in the matchless harbours of the north-east of the island their appropriate citadel from which to carry on the perennial war with the corsair. But before they were permitted to take possession of their new domain, the native population, like the men of Kent meeting the conqueror of Hastings, insisted upon having their independence recognised. Feeble as were their fortifications, Notabile being surrounded merely by a paltry rampart and ditch, and the only other place of strength on the island being Roger of Sicily's old castle of St. Angelo, on which two or three cannon had been mounted, but which otherwise was antiquated and ruinous, the Maltese displayed the same patriotic spirit which enabled them in after years to drive out the French, and refused to be handed over by their late lord in dumb acquiescence to a new sovereign.

Although essentially Oriental by race, the native population of Malta have never betrayed the slightest symptoms of any leaning towards Islamism. A Maltese of the present day is prompt to confess that there is no God but Allah, for that is his vernacular word for Deity, but for the second part of the creed of the Moslem he entertains a hatred and contempt almost fanatical. The same feeling actuated the inhabitants who tendered their conditional allegiance to the Grand Master; and his religious as well as his political distinction disposed them to receive him with respect and amity. But one of the conditions of the concordat does not look at first sight as if it could be explained satisfactorily. No Maltese was to become a Knight of the Order. This article could not have been introduced because the islanders had no aristocracy; there are titles of nobility still existing in Malta, whose owners can trace back their pedigrees to patents as old as our own baronies of Camoys and Hastings; there are sculptured memorials of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with the arms of untitled present-day gentlefolk emblazoned in all the dignity of scutigeri (esquires) upon their panels, and we can only conjecture that the desire to maintain the traditions of an independent nation induced the native dignitaries to forego a prospect, which though dazzling to ambition, would have been ruinous to autonomy. It was at any rate, as their conduct proved, from no servile instinct that they agreed to this self-denying ordinance.

The rule of the Knights of St. John is such an essential part of the

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history of the island, had such an effect upon its fortunes, and left such vast and abiding memorials of its two and a half centuries of existence, that it is necessary to give a brief sketch of the previous history of the renowned fraternity, to be known henceforth as Knights of Malta.

Before the first Crusade certain merchants of Amalfi established in the Holy City of Jerusalem a hospital or lodging for the reception of pilgrims, dedicated to St. John, either the Almoner (a Greek Bishop) or, as in later years they contended, the Precursor—John the Baptist. When the fierce Turcoman horde overpowered the milder rule of the Caliphs, Gerard, Rector of the Hospital, co-operated with Peter the Hermit in originating the Crusade, and Gerard's successor, Raymond de Puy, re-modelled the Society upon a military basis, similar to that which had already given the Order of Templars so prominent a rank in the warlike concerns of Christendom. In 1187, after having gained an honourable place in the history of the struggles to maintain the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, the Hospitallers were driven from their original abode, the ruins of which, in the Muristân at Jerusalem, have been excavated in later years by the Germans, and many interesting relics of the old buildings brought to light. The Hospitallers then settled down at S. Jean d'Acre, whence a century later they were again expelled, after a fierce contest, by the Moslems. Retiring to Cyprus, their Grand Master John de Villiers adopted for them a fresh career, and they secured and held with more or less success during several centuries the naval supremacy of the Mediterranean. One of their earliest and greatest exploits was the capture of Rhodes in 1310, whither they removed their headquarters, and received a considerable accession of resources from the suppression of the rival Order of Knights Templars, much of whose forfeited property was granted to them. Here, as the Order began to attract recruits from different countries, commenced the system of *langues*, of which there were at first six—English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and German. Later this arrangement was changed, and three French langues were formed, namely, France, Auvergne and Provence. To Spain, or Aragon, one of Castile was subsequently added, absorbing Portugal, and with Italy, England, and Germany, making seven. In 1476 the office of Grand Master was filled by the election of Peter d'Aubusson, a soldier who had gained high distinction in the wars of Charles VII. against the

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English in France, but who had not long to wait in his new capacity for an opportunity of gaining still higher distinction as a successful commander, by defending the city of Rhodes against the whole power of the Ottoman Porte, wielded at that period by the fortunate and talented Mahomet II.

The Sultan did not entirely depend upon force, for among other spies in his pay was an able and astute renegade, a German, generally spoken of in contemporary chronicles as Master George, who found admittance into the garrison for the purpose of betraying them on opportunity. His treason was discovered, and he paid the penalty with his life. The open attack was not more successful, and the remains of the Turkish host, whose original numbers have been stated at 100,000, and were certainly not less than 70,000, retired baffled with enormous loss. Mahomet was still bent upon the reduction of Rhodes when he died, and his two sons, Bajazet and Djem, or Zizim, disputed the succession. The latter, defeated, escaped to Rhodes, where he surrendered to the Grand Master. Bajezet, in consternation, plied the Order with promises and gifts, concluded a treaty of peace, and presented the hand of St. John, which Mahomet had taken with the city of Constantinople, but could not prevail upon the Order to surrender their guest, who was transferred to the protection, first of the King of France, and then of the Pope (Borgia), by whom he was poisoned in 1495. In 1521 Solyman, who had succeeded to the Turkish throne, determined again to attempt the expulsion of the Knights, and with nearly 200,000 soldiers and sailors succeeded in overwhelming a garrison of less than 7,000 of all ranks. In December, 1522, the Grand Master, after a six months' siege, was obliged to capitulate and lead the remnant of his forces in search of a new home. Candia, Messina, and Syracuse, were tried in vain, and many efforts made to obtain assistance to regain Rhodes, until at last the Emperor Charles V. offered the islands of Malta and Gozo, with complete sovereignty, clogging, however, his gift with the possession of Tripoli, which, during their brief tenure of it was simply a drain on their resources. The original grant remains preserved in the armoury at Malta, and with it the trumpet which sounded their retreat from Rhodes.

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II

THE GREAT SIEGE

THE establishment of the Order of St. John in Malta led at no distant date to the event which it may not be unreasonably supposed the politic Emperor had in his mind when he offered them the possession of that post of dignity and danger as the advanced guard of Christendom ; it drew upon them the concentrated efforts of the whole Turkish power to crush and destroy them. The thirty-five years which had elapsed since their removal to these new head-quarters had convinced Sultan Solyman of the thorn which had thus been planted in his side, and he not unnaturally aspired to consummate, by a similar exploit to the capture of Rhodes, the glories of a reign which had won already for him the title of Magnificent. Poverty of resources, and internal dissensions among the Knights themselves, had hindered them from placing their fortifications in so complete a state of defence as might have been anticipated, of which the spies of the Sultan kept him well informed ; and their Grand Master, John Parisot de la Vallette, was one of their most enterprising naval commanders, and if allowed leisure was likely to continue to work mischief to the Moslem fleets. In 1565 a great armament was collected at Constantinople which La Vallette soon understood (for the Christians had their spies too) was destined for Malta. He did his utmost to improve his fortifications, and exhausted in his appeals for aid the Courts of Europe ; finding at length that his main reliance would have to be upon his own Knights and the Maltese militia, about 6,000 in all. These, with some 1,200 regular troops, the 500 Knights, and a body of volunteers, chiefly Italians, made up less than 9,000 men, with which to sustain the assault of more than 30,000 Turkish troops, of whom 4,500 were drawn from that extraordinary force of Christian

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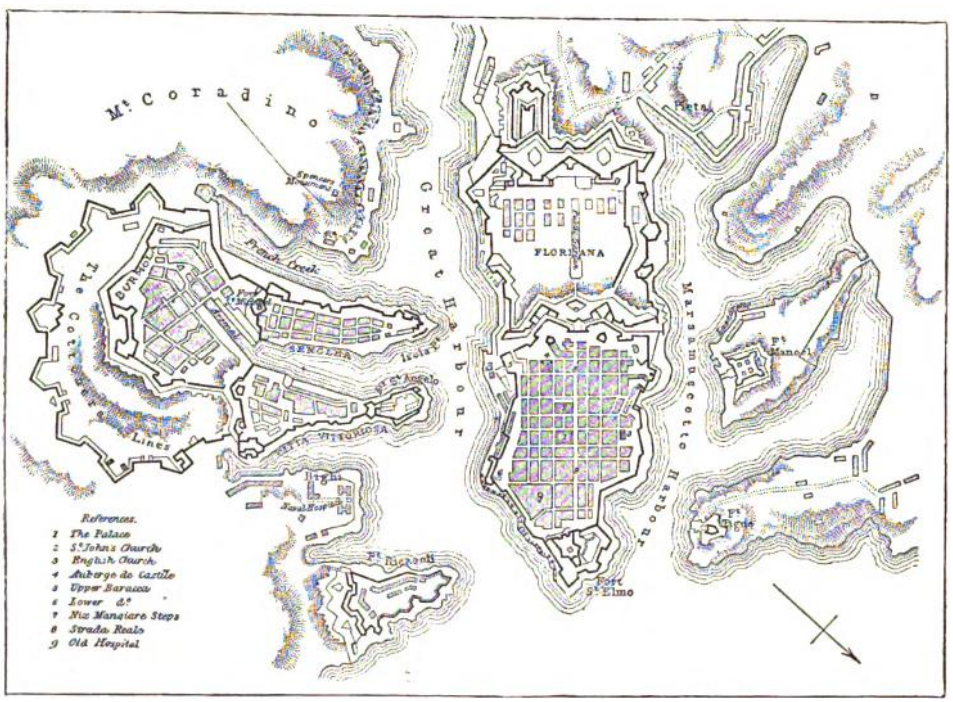
conscript children bred to fighting, who, under the name of janissaries, were the backbone of the Turkish supremacy in war.

The position which the Knights had to defend may be seen on the plan of Valletta. The central tongue of land where the city now stands was then a rugged rocky eminence known as Mount Schebarras, uninhabited and unfortified save by a castle at the north-eastern extremity, which commanded the entrance to both harbours, named after St. Erasmus



*** *At the time of the siege the only fortified positions were Senglea and the Borgo, now Città Vittoriosa, with St. Elmo.*

Plan of Valletta.

the patron Saint of mariners, St. Elmo. St. Angelo, with the Borgo in its rear, stood upon the third promontory from the entrance to the Great Harbour, and the next projection called Isola or Senglea, from a garden and menagerie established there by G. M. La Sengle, had at its landward side, the castle of St. Michael, of which a few traces remain in the modern fort now occupying its site. On one of the turrets which face the Great Harbour, may still be seen the carved

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figure of the eye, the ear, and a goose, perpetual reminders of the vigilance required of the garrison. La Vallette protected the upper or south-west flank of Senglea with a strong stockade on the edge of the water-line : from Isola Point to St. Angelo, across the mouth of the creek, he drew a huge chain ; while at the other end of the creek a bridge of boats connected the two peninsulas, and served as a defence to the galleys laid up in the harbour, and another stockade on the north-east side of the Bourg completed the seaward circle of defence. He manned the inner line of defence shown in the plan, that is to say, the redoubts and bastions which faced the land, with his trustiest Knights, and told off for the garrison of St. Elmo a body of selected soldiers of approved valour. A small garrison was left in the ancient capital, but no attempt was made to defend the rest of the island, or its dependency Gozo. Having made these dispositions of his scanty force, he again addressed a final appeal to Christendom for aid, and directed the Knights who had not yet repaired to his standard, to rendezvous at Syracuse and rejoin the garrison on convenient occasion. On the 15th May, the huge Turkish Armada arrived off the island, and, under the command of the Grand Admiral Piali, disembarked from 180 vessels the host of troops, whose commandant was the veteran Mustapha, a brave but cruel and obstinate soldier, between whom and Piali considerable difference of opinion was often arising with the effect which divided councils always have upon any enterprise. For example, Mustapha insisted upon commencing the campaign by the siege of St. Elmo, which, as he justly argued, presented an insuperable obstacle to the entrance of their ships within the safe anchorage of the Marsamuscetto ; and in spite of the desire of Piali to await the arrival of Dragut, the famous Algerine corsair, this course was adopted, batteries were erected upon Mount Schebarras, and an investment of St. Angelo from the heights above the harbour also commenced. Mark Anthony Viperan, a Knight who printed a narrative of these transactions in 1567, congratulates himself upon the foresight of the Knights in poisoning a spring at Marsa, where the Turks fixed their main camp, by which about eight hundred men were done to death ! So far however as any military operations were concerned, La Vallette, feeling the inadequacy of his force, withdrew them within the walls, and only permitted any offensive movements when provisions could be brought

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in by a convoy. He kept St. Elmo supplied with fresh defenders by reinforcements despatched under the cover of night, and by a judicious admixture of encouragement and rebuke worked upon the feelings of the garrison, until they became animated with a resolution to die at their posts.

The history of the whole siege has been so admirably written by the late General Porter, that it is unnecessary to do more than summarise his narrative. For more than four weeks the garrison of St. Elmo were

The Goose, Isola Point.

subjected to daily assaults from the overwhelming Moslem force, and from the cannonade of a battery which, if less rapid in its fire than that of the siege artillery of the present day, from the enormous calibre of the guns, exercised terrific power of destruction ; thirty-six of these heavy pieces were employed, and had not the fortress been to a great extent composed of the solid rock of the peninsula itself, it would have been entirely swept away : this circumstance also preserving the defenders from attack by mines. The outworks were speedily taken by the besiegers, and the main fort not so much breached in any particular

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place as reduced throughout to a mass of ruin. Still the brave defenders held on.

Again and again they appealed for recall or reinforcement. To the former step La Vallette could not bring himself to consent, and at one time actually proposed to take the command of the post in person—the latter requirement he supplied by despatching boats with volunteers from St. Angelo, who found admission through a subterranean passage from the rocky shore below the fort. When Dragut arrived, one of his first undertakings was to construct a battery which would command this landing place—and prevent any boat from reaching the fort. A great assault had been repelled upon June 16th, but now the defenders saw that their days were numbered; upon the 22nd another escalade was repulsed, but only sixty of the garrison remained; and an expert swimmer contrived to reach St. Angelo, and reported their desperate case. La Vallette despatched a force in five boats to bring off the survivors, but Dragut's battery, which stood on the rock now occupied by Ball's monument, prevented them from being able to succour their comrades.

Then, in the hours when trouble is succeeded by rest, the wounded and exhausted heroes partook of the Sacrament in the little chapel below the entrance of the fort, and prepared to die sword in hand; some, unable to stand upon their feet, were placed in chairs upon the breach, and for four hours the Turks were successfully resisted. At last the survivors were simply overwhelmed by numbers; a few expert divers made good their escape to St. Angelo, and nine were saved by some of Dragut's corsairs. Mustapha caused the heads of the knights to be cut off and placed on poles, while the trunks, extended on planks in the form of a cross, with the same figure gashed upon their breasts, were thrown into the harbour, and floating to St. Angelo, aroused the frenzied indignation of the garrison, who fired from their cannon the bleeding heads of Turkish prisoners by way of retaliation. During the progress of the attack, Dragut had received a mortal wound, and in his tent, on the point now known as Fort Tigne, he received the news of the fall of St. Elmo and expired, the one man of military genius in the Turkish army. In addition to this irreparable loss, 8,000 Turks fell. The loss of the Christians was 1,500, of whom 130 were members of the Order.

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The chapel where the last consolations of religion were received by the garrison, was reedified in 1649 by G. M. Lascaris, and still remains on its old foundations, deep in the rock on the right after emerging from the tunnel which forms the eastern entrance to the fort. Its dimensions are forty feet by twenty ; it is vaulted with round arches, and has a small recess for the altar ; the sides and spandrils are carved in arabesque relief. There are several coats of arms undefaced among the ornaments, for at the time of the French occupation it was preserved from their vandalism by being full of rubbish, which was cleared out by General Montague, R.E., a few years ago.

That the obstinate defence of St. Elmo saved Malta is generally admitted by historians. "What will not the parent cost us, if the child has been purchased at so terrible a price?" is the recorded exclamation of Mustapha when surveying St. Angelo from the ruins of the captured work. Still its fall gave them a great advantage. Their fleet entered the Marsamuscetto harbour at once, and about eighty of the smaller vessels were hauled by slaves over the neck of land from the upper end of one harbour to the other, and launched on the waters above Senglea. Nor was it any longer feasible for supplies for the garrison to pass from the outer sea into the harbour. The greater part of the Turkish army were moved round to the rear of the two peninsulas, and enclosed them completely by their trenches. Just before being thus shut in, however, La Vallette had received a welcome reinforcement of about 700 men, including forty-two knights who had taken advantage of a mist which fortunately overspread the coast. They also brought news of a much larger force assembled in Sicily for their aid. The value of the reinforcement was soon put to the test, for Mustapha, alarmed at the rumours which reached him of the help which had been rendered and expected, determined to press the assault with vigour. He tried unsuccessfully to bring La Vallette to a negotiation for surrender, and on the 15th of July he made a great effort, attacking St. Angelo with his own artillery, while Senglea was assailed by sea and land by a fresh force of 2,500 corsairs who had just arrived, under the command of a leader named Hassan, son of the famous corsair Barbarossa and son-in-law of Dragut. Candelissa, Hassan's lieutenant,

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led the attack of the boats upon the stockade, and effected a landing under the spur of Fort St. Michael, but after a severe struggle was driven ignominiously back by the Spanish commander Zanoguerra, who himself fell in the moment of victory. Hassan made no impression upon the landward lines, but the greatest loss sustained by the Moslem was the destruction of a large body of janissaries, despatched by Mustapha in ten boats, who, in endeavouring to round the point of St. Angelo, were exposed to the fire of a battery of three guns placed *à fleur d'eau*, by which nine of them were sunk with a loss of several hundred men. It ought to be mentioned that the success of the Knights on this occasion was owing in some degree to their having received full information of the enemy's design from a deserter, a Greek named Lascaris, who held a high position in the Turkish army. Although at first some suspicions were entertained of his good faith, he turned out to be a sincere and valuable ally, and one of his family in after years obtained the baton of Grand Master. Mustapha now assumed the command of the attack on Senglea, leaving the Borgo to Piali; the artillery on both fronts soon reduced the ramparts to a state of ruin, and on the 7th of August a combined attack was made, which on the Senglea front was almost successful; the horse-tail standards of the Moslem were planted on the breach, and the leading column had forced its way through the defenders, when on a sudden Mustapha gave the signal for retreat. The cause of this was a diversion from Città Vecchia, showing how correct was the criticism of Dragut, who pointed out on his arrival that the Turks ought never to have left an armed post in their rear, although he considered that it was inadvisable at that stage to withdraw forces for the reduction of the capital. The enemy therefore kept up a pretty strict blockade, with occasional demonstrations against the city walls, and on the other hand the garrison of Notabile used to send out parties of cavalry to forage and harass stragglers. One of these flying columns of about three hundred musketeers, and as many cavalry, were, as Viperan informs us, making their usual reconnaissance, when the noise of the combat and the fact that they were almost unopposed, led them to believe that a critical assault was taking place, and that a diversion would be of great use; so posting the

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musketeers in a position to secure their retreat, they galloped into the camp of the Turks, only occupied by a few sentinels and the wounded, and with loud shouts and demonstrations cut down all whom they met. The rear of the assailing column took the alarm, imagined that the army from Sicily had landed, and rushed back to their tents.

From this date the story of the siege is the same from day to day : efforts, constantly repulsed, to take the city by storm, mines and countermines, fights in the water between Turkish swimmers armed with axes, endeavouring to cut the chain at the mouth of the creek, and Maltese swimmers with daggers defending it ; all the while, however, the small body of defenders growing weaker, and less able to man the fortifications, until it seemed at last as if they must be worn out as the garrison of St. Elmo had been. The Viceroy of Sicily, who had by this time under his command at Syracuse a considerable body of troops and a large fleet, still made no sign of coming to the rescue. His supineness had two parents ; one that, from the first, the Turkish fleet had the superiority at sea, and even now Candelissa with a large squadron was constantly hovering round the mouth of the port ; the other that his master, the cold calculating Philip of Spain, had ordered him not to intervene until the decisive moment when the Order could no longer hold out against the force of the Turk. So greatly did he feel his responsibility, that he despatched an envoy, Salazar, to inspect personally and report upon the state of affairs. Viperan gives a curious narrative of this mission ; the envoy reached Città Vecchia in safety, and with an escort of sixty horse started from thence at four o'clock in the morning for Tarscien, a village about a mile in the rear of the Turkish camp, where they left their escort, and Salazar, with five companions only, penetrated right through the lines of the enemy, left unguarded with true Oriental indiscipline, and returned at daylight to the city, not however without a skirmish with a Mahometan force. A characteristic incident is narrated in connection with this by Viperan. A Maltese horseman had seized a Turk, and tying his hands hoisted him *en croupe*, as a prisoner : the Turk got his hands free, and in his turn gripped his captor so tight that he could neither draw sword nor rein ; another cavalier of St. John thereupon ran the Turk through, and tumbled him on the ground. The

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Città Vecchia, Malta.

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Maltese was not satisfied without a trophy, and while hacking at his foe's head, three more of the pursuing force fell on him and he lost his own !

It became evident however that succour could not be long delayed. When even Protestant England put up public prayers in her churches for the deliverance of Malta, the saturnine Philip must have felt shamed into action. The superhuman exertions of the defenders, continued so unintermittingly under the tropical heat of a Malta summer, could not endure for ever. La Vallette himself had moved his quarters to a small house near the chief point of attack, where his arms are this day visible carved in the wall : this movement was probably made in consequence of a suggestion which had been brought forward in anticipation of another grand attack, of which they had been forewarned, on the 23rd August, that they should abandon the towns, and defend themselves in the castle of St. Angelo. The assault was repulsed, and so was another on the 1st of September, when the besiegers actually were forced to the charge by blows from the swords of their own officers. Yet when the Viceroy of Sicily called a council, a speaker urged that considering the expressed intention of the Turks to abandon Malta after destroying the Order, it would be better to allow them to do so, and reoccupy it. Happily this prudent counsellor stood alone. At length a horseman brought news to Mustapha, just as he was assembling his hordes for one more effort to storm the defences, that an army had landed from Sicily : at once a retreat was commenced, and all the war material hurried to the ships, which was scarcely effected ere the garrison occupied the deserted posts, and the Turkish commanders learned that less than 9,000 men had landed from the Christian fleet. Hurriedly determining to try the fortune of war once more, Mustapha landed about an equal number of soldiers at St. Paul's Bay, and began a march towards the capital. An irregular skirmish with the advanced guard led to a general engagement, in which the Mahometan force was driven to the ships with heavy loss. So ended this famous siege ; about 40,000 men had been engaged in the attack, of whom barely 15,000 survived to return to Constantinople. The number of those engaged in the defence was originally under 9,000, and about 700 were added in the course of the struggle, of these only 600 were left unwounded at the close. It

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was a world-renowned effort of heroic endurance. A mass of requiem is still sung annually on the 7th of September for those who fell in this

Strada San Giovanni, Valletta. Drawn by A. Ansted.

famous war. As the bells of St. John's begin their mournful toll (for splendid as they are and silvery, the Maltese manage to make the worst

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of their bells), the people may be heard to exclaim: "It is the deliverance of the Knights."

La Vallette survived until August 1568. He saw with pride and well-deserved pleasure the laying of the first stone of the memorial city, for which the funds were collected under the authority of a Bull from Pope Pius the Fourth from Catholics in all lands in honour of the Knights. It now occupies the surface of Mount Schebarras, and is known by the name of the victorious hero himself: but he did not live to see its completion, and in fact his plan was never carried out in its entirety. The original design was to cut down the rocky peninsula to a nearly level platform, surrounded by fortifications: but this purpose was only carried out through a very small area, and the "streets of stairs" represent the failure to realise it. In 1577 his remains were transferred to the crypt of St. John's, where they lie under a magnificent sarcophagus of bronze, surmounted by a recumbent figure in full knightly panoply, and with a Latin epitaph from the pen of his faithful secretary, the Englishman, Oliver Starkey, which it may be worth while to give, because Porter's book, usually so accurate, contains an erroneous version.

"Salvator eques, Vallettæ conditor unus;
Invicta ex Illo nobile nomen habet.
Hic Syriæ Lybiæque pavor, Tuletaque quondam
Europæ, edomitis sacra per arma Getis.
Primus in hac alma quam condidit urbe sepultus
Vallettæ eterno dignus honore jacet."

His hat and sword are still reverentially preserved in the church of St. Lorenzo in the old Borgo.

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III

ST. JOHN'S CONVENTUAL CHURCH

A CHURCH of which Walter Scott could write that it was the most magnificent he had ever seen, is worthy of some special and detailed description, often as it has been attempted. The work of La Vallette's architect, Girolamo Cussar, it combines externally the characteristics of a place of strength with that of worship.

"Half church of God, half castle 'gainst the Scot,"

as was said of Durham Cathedral;—but if this causes the exterior to be in some degree heavy and meagre, it is internally admirable in its just proportion, superb in the profusion of its ornament, unequalled in its sepulchral magnificence. What it must have been before its spoliation by the French, only the imagination of the author of *Vathek* could conceive. Still grander must have been the effect when the central nave was filled by chevaliers of the Order, for chaplains, esquires, and others of inferior grades were relegated to the side chapels (whence came a by-word, "A gentleman of the transept")—when the magnificent silver-gilt chandeliers, one of which alone held 130, and another 97 lights, shed a rich glow upon their picturesque habits, and the splendour of the pictorial decoration was enhanced by the beautiful tapestry copied from the finest works of Rubens by the famous De Vos brothers of Brussels. Even the heavy exterior, looking all the heavier from being in line with the palaces of the Grand Prior and the Treasurer of the Order, has, viewed from the roof, a Cyclopean grandeur inseparable from huge symmetrical masses of stone, and the noble simplicity of the Campo Santo on the South side of the church has a dignity becoming the heroic traditions of the Knights of St. John, whose bones lie beneath. But within, from floor to ceiling, one blaze of rich memorial antiquity attracts you on every side. The simple barrel vault which

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constitutes the nave is fifty feet in breadth, and is divided on either side of its length of 187 feet, by massive piers and arches, from six transeptal chapels, which again communicate by smaller arches, one with another, so as to produce the effect of side aisles. The floor, both of the nave and chapels, is paved with tombstones of chevaliers of bygone days, more than four hundred in number, one vast mass of heraldic emblazonment in mosaic of precious marbles of every shade and colour, the mere

Exterior of St. John's Conventual Church. Drawn by R. Serle.

catalogue of these elaborate works of artistic fancy being contained in three folio volumes; while gorgeous piles of sculpture interspersed with bronzes and paintings adorn the walls of the transepts, and mark the resting-places of the later Grand Masters of the Order, and of other illustrious personages.

The roof is *à chevet plat*, of semi-cylindrical form, pierced with circular

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apertures for light in lieu of dormers, an arrangement which detracts a little from the effect of the pictorial decoration, which is of the florid later Italian school. Matteo Preti, generally spoken of as Il Calabrese, from the country of his birth, was the artist of this ceiling, executing his designs in oil upon the stone in that style known to Italian artists as *Sotto in su*, which gives a relief to the figures as viewed from below. Preti resided in Malta from 1661 to 1699, and during the whole of that period was employed upon this roof and similar works for the Order.[1] He was buried among his patrons in the church which he adorned. The subjects which he selected are, appropriately, scenes from the history of St. John the Baptist, in seven zones or panels, which are again surrounded or divided by figures of saints, martyrs, and heroes, illustrative of the history of the Order. Between 1867 and 1874 the ceiling was restored by a native artist. The drawing of the various figures is extremely correct and spirited, and the colour rich without tawdriness. In one of the panels, which represents the daughter of Herodias dancing before Herod, there is a singular instance of that far-fetched fancy which in Elizabethan English goes by the name of "conceit." Hovering in the air over the damsel is a demon, who is engaged in moving her limbs by strings after the manner of a marionette figure—a misplaced piece of ingenuity, more defensible, however, than that of Michael Angelo da Caravaggio, who, in his fine painting of the decollation of St. John, in the Oratory Chapel, makes the blood trickling from the trunk form the letters M A C. In spite of this bad taste, the painting is a superb one, and worth inspecting, though hung in a bad light. In this chapel, formerly used for the instruction of novices, there are some handsome benches carved or inlaid with the devices of the various langues of which the Order was composed. Here, too, was kept the great relic of the Order, the hand of St. John, sent as a present by Sultan Bajazet to Grand Master D'Aubusson, possibly with a hope that his brother and rival Zizim, who had fled to the

[1] M. Darcel, the Director of the Gobelins, a competent critic, says of Preti, that though only a painter of the second rank he throws himself with such ease into vast and striking compositions, unites with such skill heaven and earth, poses his figures and draperies so unconstrainedly, as to compare most favourably with modern designers whose decorative contrivances have been extolled by ignorant leaders of public opinion as too beautiful for the ceilings for which they were intended.

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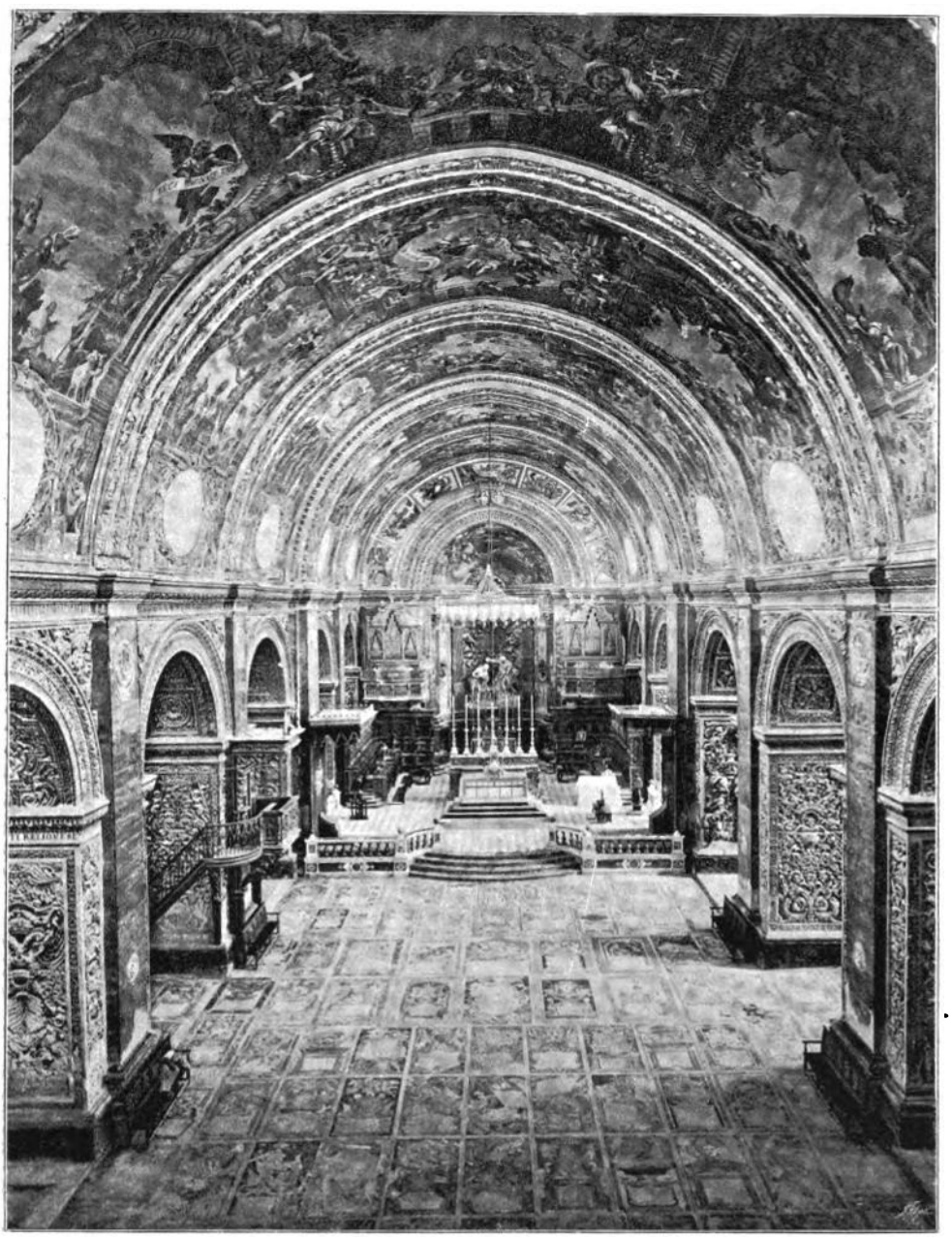

Interior of St. John's Church, Malta.

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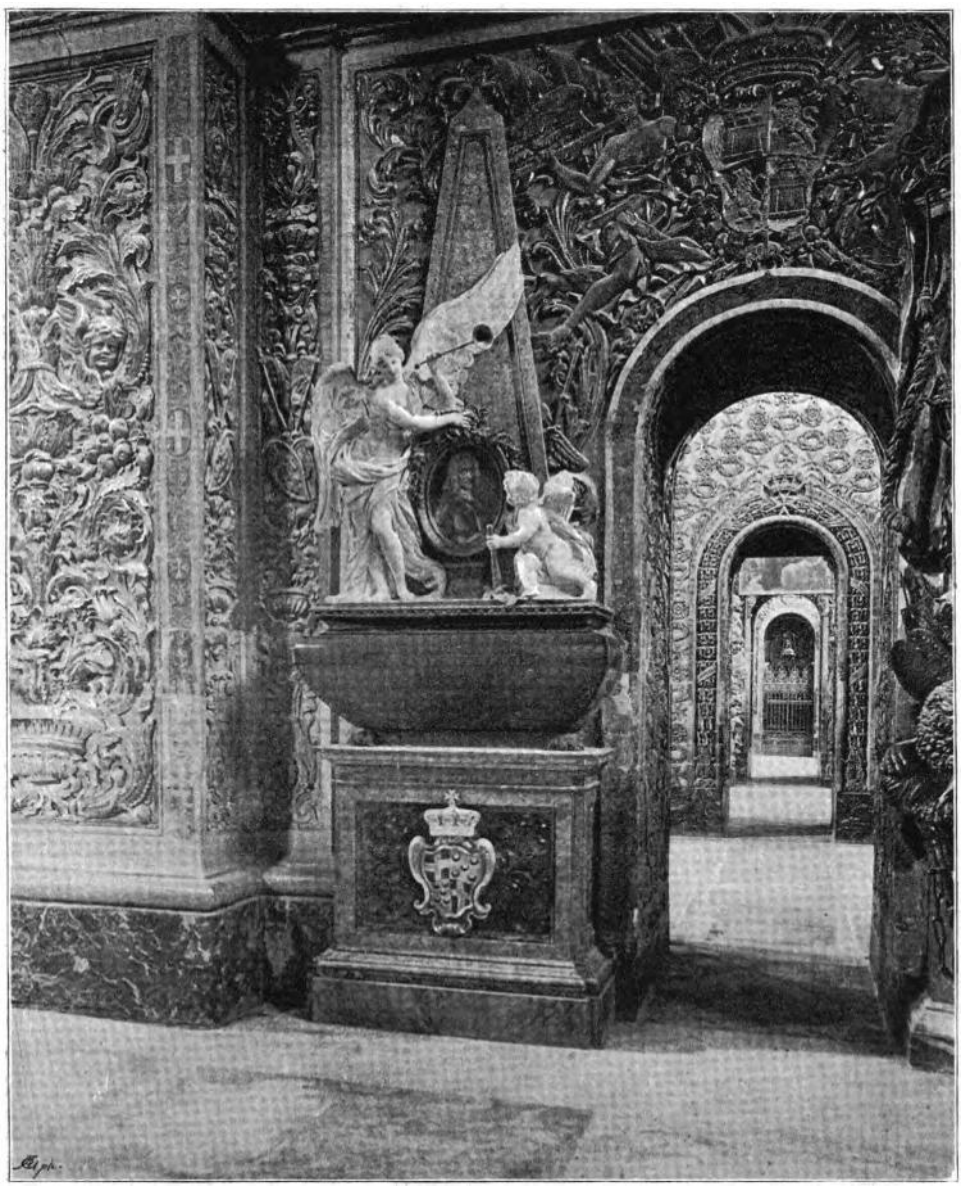
protection of the Knights of Rhodes, might be given up in return. It was brought hither from Rhodes, and inclosed in a splendid gauntlet



Tomb of the Grand Master Pinto.

shaped monstrance of solid gold, bedecked with costly gems ; in front of this lay a gold ring, set with a large diamond (or sapphire), which

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Napoleon put upon his own finger, and ordered the case to be taken on board the *Orient*, contemptuously leaving the "dead hand" to Grand Master Hompesch, who carried it to St. Petersburg and presented it to the Emperor Paul.

If we take the chapels in order, the next on the right hand is dedicated to St. James, and assigned to the langue of Castile. Here is the monument of Grand Master Pinto, a Portuguese who presided over the Order at the time of the visit of the English traveller Brydone in 1770, "a clear-headed little sensible old man," the writer has recorded; "although he is considerably upwards of ninety, he retains all the faculties of his mind in perfection": he died however three years after this visit. His portrait in mosaic by the artist Favray is the principal feature in this monument. The walls of the nave, we may here remark, were inlaid with green marble at the expense of G. M. Nicholas Cottoner, 1663, and the general character of the ornamentation is of a Spanish style, white on a gold ground, but in each chapel the design is varied with reference to the heraldic insignia of the langue to which the shrine specially appertained, or to the benefactor at whose cost the decoration was carried out. Thus the cotton tree of Cottoner and the pears of Perellos are eminently conspicuous, while the crowned dolphin of Auvergne, and the double-headed German eagle designate the respective oratories of these langues. With more than questionable taste the French Government was permitted to hack off the richly floreated surface of the chapel of France, in which the handsome modern effigy of Count de Beaujolais (brother of Louis Philippe) has been erected, and to substitute little crosses and fleur-de-lys stuck upon a plain surface of stone.

Next to the chapel of St. James is a transept merely used as a vestibule from the corridor which leads to the Campo Santo and the Strada St. Lucia; crossing this, we enter the chapel of St. John, or of the langue of Aragon. Here are some of the most superb of the princely memorials of the rulers of the Order. Bernini's two statues, the Asiatic and the African, in chains, which remind one of Southey's description of the throne in Padalon where

> "Human forms sustained its ponderous weight
> With lifted hands outspread, and shoulders bowed
> Bending beneath their load."

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High Altar, St. John's Church, Valletta.

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are copies, we know, of two grand bronze originals by John of Bologna, but in wealth of decoration, pictorial and statuesque, the whole chapel can hardly be surpassed. Beyond it lies the chapel of Auvergne or Saint Sebastian, and last upon this side is the chapel of our Lady of Philermos, so called from a miraculous icon now at St. Petersburg. Here are the famous silver rails, which in 1752 cost £800, being the votive offering of one-fifth of the personal property of two of the Knights. By the Statutes of the Order, Grand Masters on their election, and all Knights on their promotion to higher rank, were bound to present to the Conventual Church a valuable gift of some kind, figuratively spoken of as a Gioja or Bijou. Hence are derived these costly decorative ornaments lavished upon the great Church, the portable part of which became the spoil of the rapacious French in 1798. Sir Ferdinand Inglott, the late Post-master-General of Malta, pithily observes: "A few objects were left, deemed indispensable for the services. These objects are still to be seen in the empty presses of the Church Treasury, provoking specimens of past marvellous magnificence, of which the Temple was sacrilegiously deprived." Although the rails in this chapel escaped the clutches of the plunderer from the happy thought of concealing them under a coat of paint, yet the historian of the *Expédition Française en Egypte* states that the sanctuary lamp and chain taken from the chapel of Notre Dame de Philermos, of solid gold weighing 1,840 ounces, were first converted into ingots at the camp, and afterwards coined into zecchins at Cairo." The keys which hang in this chapel are not, as usually described, those of Jerusalem and Rhodes, but actually of Patras, Passava, Lepanto, and Anameta, places once under the dominion of the Knights.

Our tour of the Church has now brought us to the High Altar of lapis lazuli and precious marbles, with its furniture of magnificent silver candlesticks and lamps. Of finer workmanship, if of less costly material, is a very elegant bronze eagle with the arms of Lorraine upon it, in the style of Jean Goujon, presented in 1557 by the Grand Prior Francis of Lorraine. Behind the altar, in an apse, is the representation of the Baptism of our Lord by St. John, sculptured in white marble by the Maltese, Melchior Gafa; it was not finished by him, and was placed here after his death in 1714. On either side the sanctuary are two seats under crimson baldaquins, one for the representative of Queen Victoria, the

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other for the (titular) Archbishop of Rhodes, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Malta. It must not however be forgotten that St. John's is not his cathedral church—that being situate at the ancient capital Notabile—but the conventual church of the Order of St. John.

The crypt below the choir contains the most interesting of the memorials of the Grand Masters ; among the twelve whose tombstones occupy its floor and walls, are L'Isle Adam, the first to take possession of Malta, and the hero of the siege, La Vallette. Oliver Starkey, secretary to the latter, lies at his patron's feet, the only Knight not a Grand Master honoured with sepulture here.

Returning to the upper world in the chapel of St. Carlo, the eastern-most on the north side of the choir, appropriated in 1784 to that revived Anglo-Bavarian langue which G. M. de Rohan endeavoured to establish, there is one very interesting relic of antiquity, more illustrious in its past associations than for any beauty—the wooden statue of St. John, which was the figure-head of the galley in which L'Isle Adam entered the port of St. Angelo, and thereafter occupied a like position on the flagship of succeeding Grand Masters. The chapel of Provence, St. Michael's, contains the monuments of two Grand Masters, one of whom, de Lascaris, who died 1657, derived his descent from a quasi-royal house in the Riviera, and was a lineal representative of the Greek fugitive whose aid was of such value to the Knights in the siege of 1565.

Had not the French chapel been so barbarously disfigured it would have been one of the most worthy of notice, containing as it does the monuments of the princely de Vignacourts and de Rohan, besides the modern one to Count Beaujolais. At the foot of de Rohan's grave lie the bones of his niece (the only female interred in the church), by the authority of Sir Thomas Maitland—during whose autocracy the good old lady died. This chapel is dedicated to St. Paul, as the next, or Italian chapel, is to St. Catherine, in which is the monument of G. M. Carraffa. The German chapel bears the dedication of the Magi, the three kings of Cologne, and we next come to the entrance of the Sacristy. Robbed as the church has been of many of its treasures, there are still some ecclesiastical vessels of valuable material and fine workmanship preserved here ; also many beautiful and ancient pieces of

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Walter L Bells Ph. Sc.

The Chapel of Our Lady of Philermos in St Johns Church Malta.

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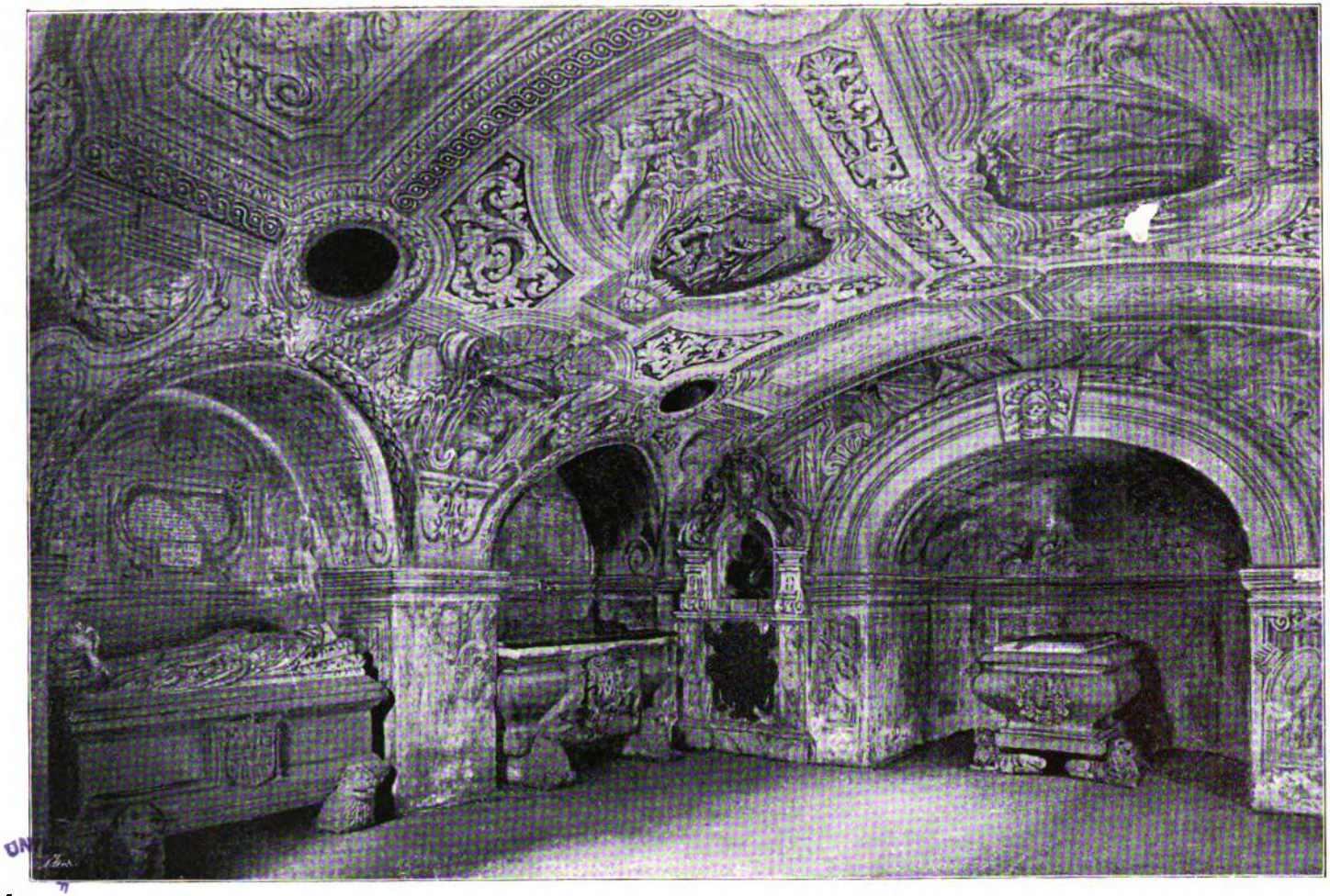

The Crypt of St. John's Church, Malta.

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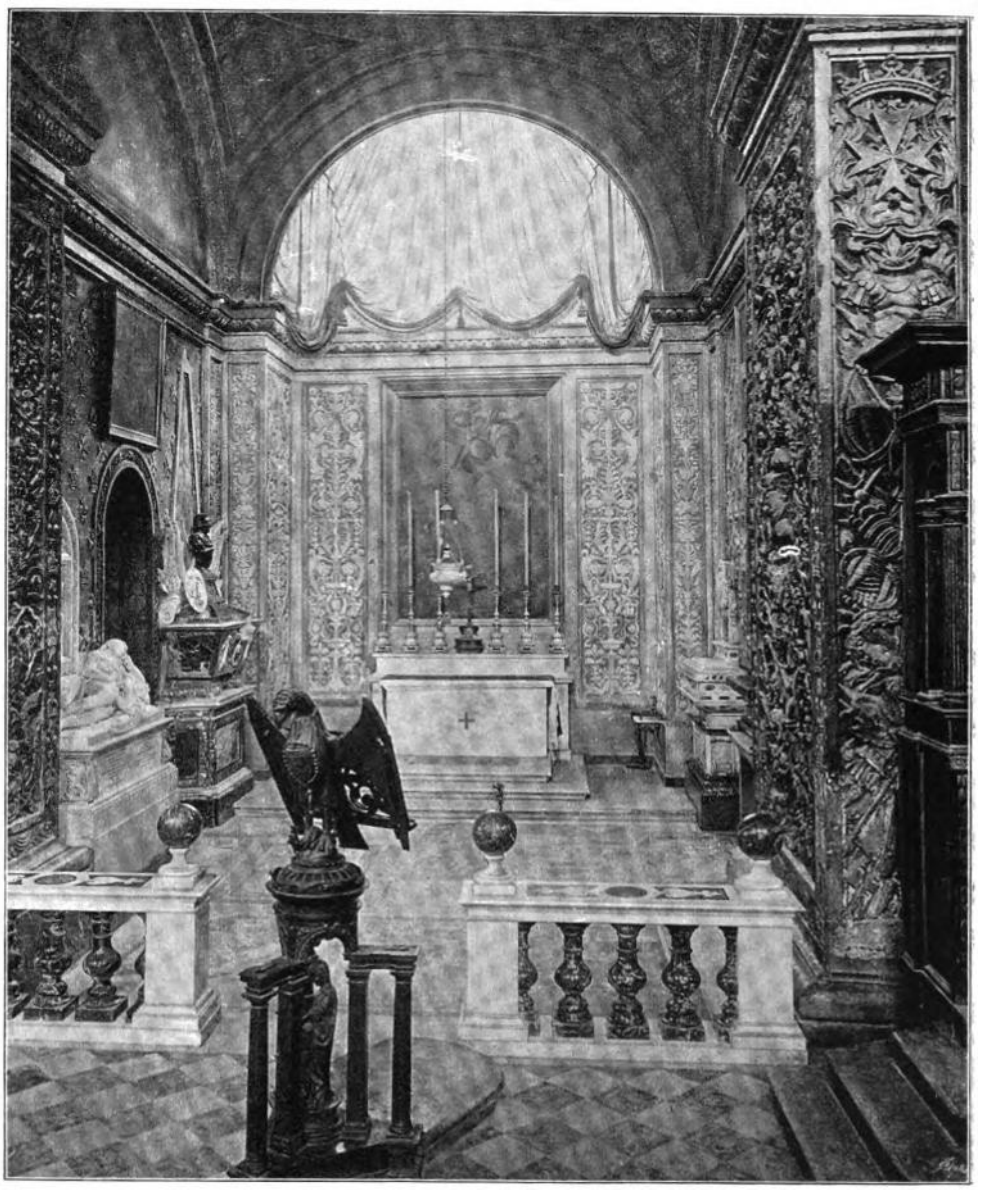
embroidery, one piece in particular representing a miraculous repulse of the Turks in an attack on Città Vecchia in 1470; and some truly



The French Chapel, St. John's Church, Malta.

splendid robes of former Grand Masters, a delight to connoisseurs in embroidery. The beautifully illuminated service books, twenty-two in

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all, of various dates from the commencement of the sixteenth to the close of the seventeenth century, are full of historical and artistic value.

Tomb of the Grand Master Carraffa.

The arms, devices, and mottoes of L'Isle Adam, Lascaris, Paula, and Carraffa, with others, decorate these books.

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St. Paul.

St. Andrew.

Tapestries in St. John's Church, Malta.

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One might linger for days over these relics of the past, and yet find new matter for admiration and reflection. The marbles below your feet, which glisten during a scirocco wind as if newly polished, are themselves a constant source of interesting observation; fantastic taste has run riot in some of them, and the skeleton figures of which the artists were so fond are in all the grotesque attitudes of a mediæval dance of death. There are paintings, too, of no inconsiderable merit, which repay inspection, though all but smothered in the splendour of their setting.

The crowning embellishment of the church is, however, rarely visible to an English eye. It is the grand tapestry, the present of the Grand Master Perellos (1697), which he had prepared, under the direction of the painter Preti, by the eminent Flemish *tapissiers*, the brothers de Vos of Brussels, expressly to fit into the proportions and to harmonise with the decorations of the Conventual Church. The suite consists of fourteen large pieces, 20 × 22 feet each, and the same number of narrow pieces, 6 × 22 feet, with an additional panel containing the portrait of the donor himself, attended by two allegorical figures, one personifying Charity as an angel distributing alms to the poor, the other Victory, in full armour, trampling, sword in hand, on the Moslem enemy prostrate and in chains: this hung over the west entrance, flanked on right and left by two of the panels *en grisaille* containing figures of the Apostles Jude and Simon. The *grisailles* are the narrow pieces already mentioned, exactly corresponding to the dimensions of the piers of the nave, each with the figure, treated as a statue in stone-colour, of one of the eleven Apostles, the Apostle Paul, the Virgin Mary, and our Saviour, making altogether the fourteen figures. They divide the large subject-pictures which are hung across the arches at the entrance of each of the lateral chapels, and constitute a serial history of the progress of Christianity in connection with the Papal Church. The splendour of their colouring is quite in harmony with the brilliancy of the roof above and the pavement below; twelve of the fourteen are unquestionably taken from pictures by Rubens, some of which are in Brussels still, some at the Louvre, some at Madrid; the remaining two are conjectured to be from originals by Nicholas Poussin. The large panels are arranged as pictures in highly

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enriched frames, on each one of which appear the arms of Perellos—three pears quartered, as Grand Master, by the cross of the Order. The same escutcheon occupies the lower half of the narrow panels, with a trophy of arms surrounding it. It seems almost incredible that the whole of this great work should have been executed in less than three years, the tapestry having been placed in the church on February 7th, 1701. In order to expedite their completion it would seem that the manufacturer, Josse or Jodocus de Vos, was compelled to entrust portions of them, or even entire tapestries, to other looms, to be executed in separate portions and joined together ; this haste somewhat impaired the beauty and symmetry of the work : in some of the *grisailles* for instance, a shadow is abruptly cut off and made to fall in a different direction. The proportions of some of the figures are distorted, and marks of junction are traceable occasionally throughout, but as a whole they are an extraordinary and majestic series. A distinguished native virtuoso, now no more, printed during the past year his ideas upon the subject of the design and arrangement of these fine works of art ; according to Sir F. Inglott they depict, as just suggested, the scheme of the Catholic Church, and they were arranged in pairs to carry on by correspondence the dogmatic teaching of the Roman theologians. The first pair of subjects are the Annunciation, and the Four Evangelists, by whom the good news was made known to mankind : next we have the Incarnation of the Saviour and the Adoration of the Magi opposite to it : the third pair (Poussin's) being the Entry into Jerusalem, and the Last Supper. The fourth pair, the Calvary and the Resurrection, are from two of Rubens' best known works. In the next pair we enter on ecclesiastical symbolism, the one being the institution of the Feast of Corpus Domini by Pope Urban IV., bearing a great resemblance to the famous work of Raphael at the Vatican, known as *La Disputa del Sacramento ;* and its fellow being the Triumph of Charity—a thoroughly Rubenesque work. Charity is represented in a golden car, drawn by lions, and two celestial beings are depicted as burning writhing vipers, the emblems of human hatred, strife, and contention. The two next allegories, also magnificent compositions, are the Triumph of the Church and the Triumph of Faith : and the series closes with Time unveiling Truth, and the most elaborate

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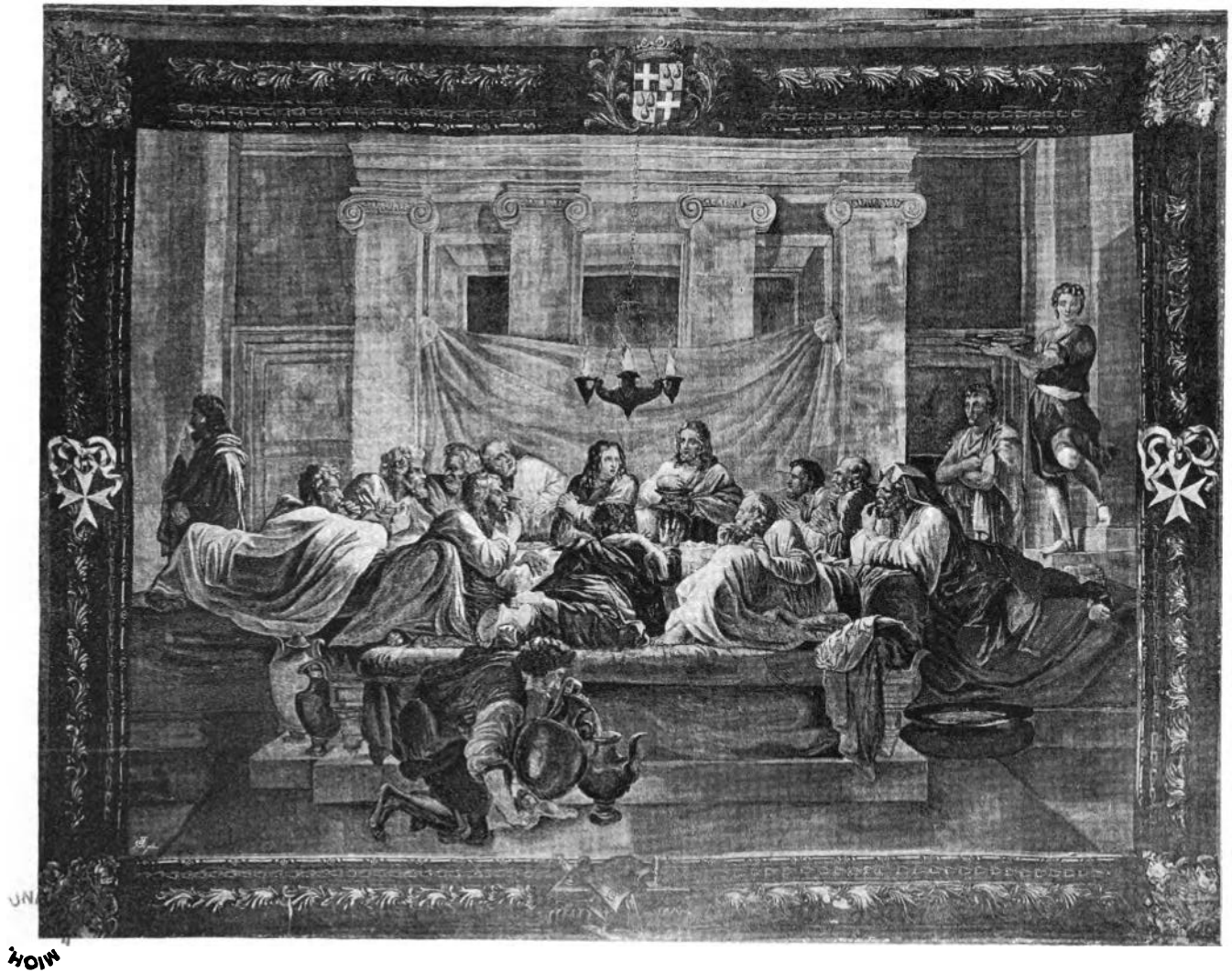

Tapestry in St. John's Church.—The Last Supper.

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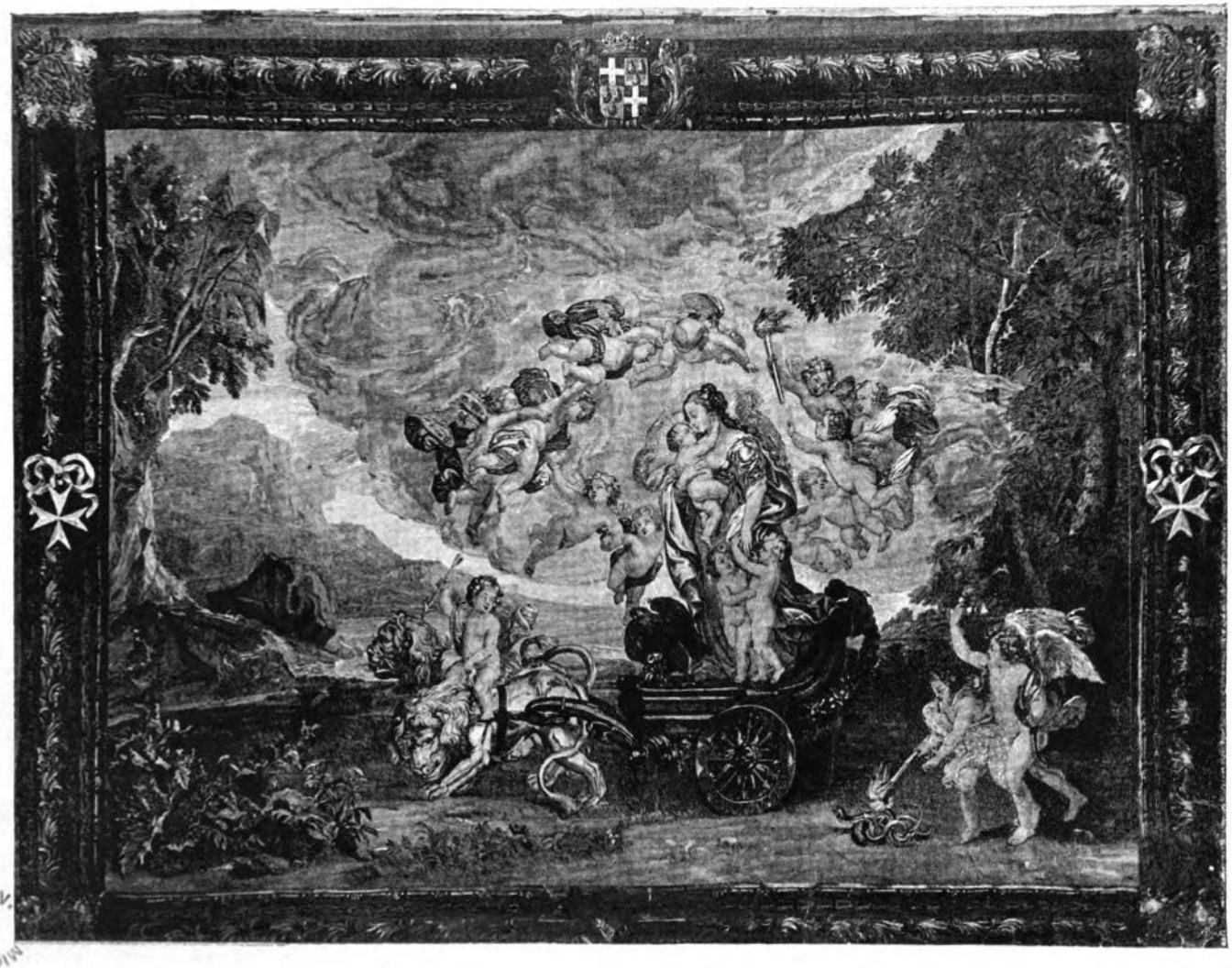

Tapestry in St. John's Church.—The Triumph of Charity, after Rubens.

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and spirited of all the compositions, representing the Destruction of Idolatry.

About twelve years ago "it was discovered that all the light and clear-coloured portions of the tapestries which were woven in silk were utterly ruined, the silk crumbling to dust at the touch; and thus the necessity for their being rewoven was imminent. In some cases this destruction only affected the lights in the hair or the beards, or a portion of the draperies, but in other cases the ruin was more widely spread, and the whole of the drapery had to be renewed, and even in the case of some of the brown and deeper colours which are in wool, these also were found to be in equally ruined condition, and their renewal to be as much necessary as in the case of the silk." It need hardly be added that the then Chief Secretary, Sir Victor Houlton, from whom the last sentence is quoted, did not allow this state of things to continue. An expert, Chevalier Palmieri of Naples, was employed to repair the fabric, and some doubts having been expressed as to the mode of restoration adopted, M. Darcel, the Director of the Gobelins factory, visited Malta, and in an interesting report, in which many facts about the history of the tapestry were elicited, pronounced in favour of the reparation.

In 1887 the repair of the tapestry was completed at an expense of £3,000 to Government, and it was handed back to the Chapter of the Conventual Church, to remain unseen and untouched for eleven months in the year, and to be brought out for a few days in June only. As in a Maltese June the visitors have left, the fleet has departed for its summer cruise, every officer who can obtain leave is on furlough, passers-by are rare, and even the chief native families frequently leave the island, it does seem unfortunate that these valuable works of art, upon which so large a sum of public money has been well spent, should be relegated to the dank shade of obscurity. If at Christmas, when the church is swathed in tasteless red hangings, these beautiful pictures were displayed, they would be admired and commented on by artist and amateur alike, as the similar gifts of Perellos in the council chamber of the Palace are now.

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IV

VALLETTA

It is quite impossible to convey by any effort of word-painting the impression produced by the first sight of the city of Valletta from the sea, sweeping down by terraces from the summit of the rock, "the high walls, the houses rising one above the other, the arches of the two Baraccas, the three cities on the opposite side of the harbour, with Fort Ricasoli, St. Angelo, and the fortifications of Florian, the creeks with the merchant vessels and ships of war lying at anchor, and the walls of Cottonera form altogether a *coup d'œil* of a very imposing character." A writer in the *Quarterly Review* many years ago called it a picture which can scarce be paralleled in the world.

This is not much dissimilar to the opinion of the late Lord Beaconsfield: "If that fair Valletta, with its streets of palaces, its picturesque forts and magnificent church, only crowned some green and azure island of the Ionian Sea, Corfu, for instance, I really think that the ideal of landscapes would be realized." It has a beauty also, beyond the external symmetry and magnificence which it presents, the beauty of suggestion, tempting you to the study of its history, and repaying in ample abundance any pains which you take to investigate it.

Valletta proper is not an ancient city, by comparison at least with other famous places of pilgrimage. It was only projected in 1565, and St. John's was not finished until 1577, while during the latter part of the seventeenth and nearly all the eighteenth century successive Grand Masters in turn each modernized his predecessor's work. To talk of the Auberge de Castile "echoing to the mailed tread of the Castilian," is mere misleading verbiage. The Auberges are stately Italian palaces, more modern than St. James's or Hampton Court, the churches florid

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renaissance, with no more Gothic about them than St. Paul's, the forts English redoubts of our grandsires' time. The French, too, during their happily brief occupation, not only looted with persistent cupidity, but recklessly destroyed any armorial mementos of the rule of the Order. Nor have the proceedings of the English Government been always as correct in point of taste as in intention. To remove statues from the position to which they belonged for the sake of adorning another public place, is a falsification of history which carries with it its own condemnation. Yet the lover of the picturesque and romantic cannot fail to admire the trophy-capital of the Knights of St. John.

It is indeed essentially a chivalrous city, interpenetrated with the legends of the history of the Order. When a fine building presents itself and you ask its name, it is probably an auberge, one of the barracks of the seven langues. Of these the finest, that belonging to the langue of Castile, is the mess-room and quarters of the officers of the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers ; the Auberge d'Italie in the Strada Mercanti, nearly opposite, being the office of the latter corps. This plain, well-proportioned building, has on its front the bust of G. M. Carraffa, 1680, in a florid trophy of white marble, and in the court-yard, round which it is built, is an elegant stone arch over a well, which bears the same Grand Master's arms. These two auberges are situated in the upper part of the city near the Porto Reale, the only exit to the country. Not far off, in the Strada Reale, the main street, is the Auberge de Provence, occupied at present as the Union Club. With a plain *façade*, this building internally contains a fine suite of stately apartments, including a spacious ball-room (one of the two with floors of wood which the city can boast, the saloons and corridors of the palaces being all stone), gaily decorated with arabesques by an Italian artist in the early part of the present century, when it was appropriated to its modern purpose. It was the scene of the entertainment given by the garrison to Sir Walter Scott, on the occasion of his visit in 1831, when he remarks that he had some difficulty in escaping a mimic coronation with laurel by some local poetaster. A little lower down the street is the Auberge d'Auvergne, now appropriated to the Courts of Justice. The Auberge de France which stands at the head of Strada Forni (the bake-house street), where

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the ovens of the Knights still supply the needs of the garrison, though spacious, has nothing in its architecture worth notice, and the same may be said of the Auberge d'Aragon, now the official residence of the general commanding the garrison. Close to this building stood the Auberge of Germany, which was pulled down when the English church was built at the foot of Strada Vescovo, as the Auberge d'Inghilterra, a small building suited to the moribund condition of the English langue at the time of the foundation of the city, was, when the handsome Opera House was erected after the design of Mr. Barry in 1861. Not far from the Auberge d'Aragon, in the same north-western quarter of the city, looking over the entrance to the Marsamuscetto harbour from an elevated rampart—under which is the curious subterranean entrance known as the Jews' sally-port, from this part of Valletta having been appropriated as a Ghetto—stands the handsome building generally styled the Baviere, the officers' quarters for the regiment stationed in Fort St. Elmo, but originally erected for that Anglo-Bavarian langue which the Grand Master de Rohan endeavoured to found in 1784, and to which he united the Grand Priory of Poland.

In mentioning subterranean communications, one must not be forgotten, which is often talked of but seldom visited, called the Manderaggio, a word which means a "place for cattle." Disembarking at the stairs in the quarantine harbour, and passing towards the centre of the city through the bustling Strada St. Marco, a doorway on the left may excite the wayfarer's attention from its evidently leading into a public stair or steep alley, while a little further on a wider open street runs down a declivity to a level apparently lower than that of the pier at which you have just landed. In fact this small portion of the town is an excavation in the lowest level of the promontory, intended to be used as a dock for the warships of the Order, and after that purpose was abandoned, occupied by the poorer class of work-people, to whom the recommendation of being close to their work outweighs the drawbacks of the closely-packed, ill-drained alleys and cellars in which they herd. It is however only fair to observe that the death-rate of this district is not exceptionally high, nor are the houses, though foul and damp, reduced to that sordid disrepair which would be the case in similar situations in London or New York. All Maltese houses are solid, stone being the

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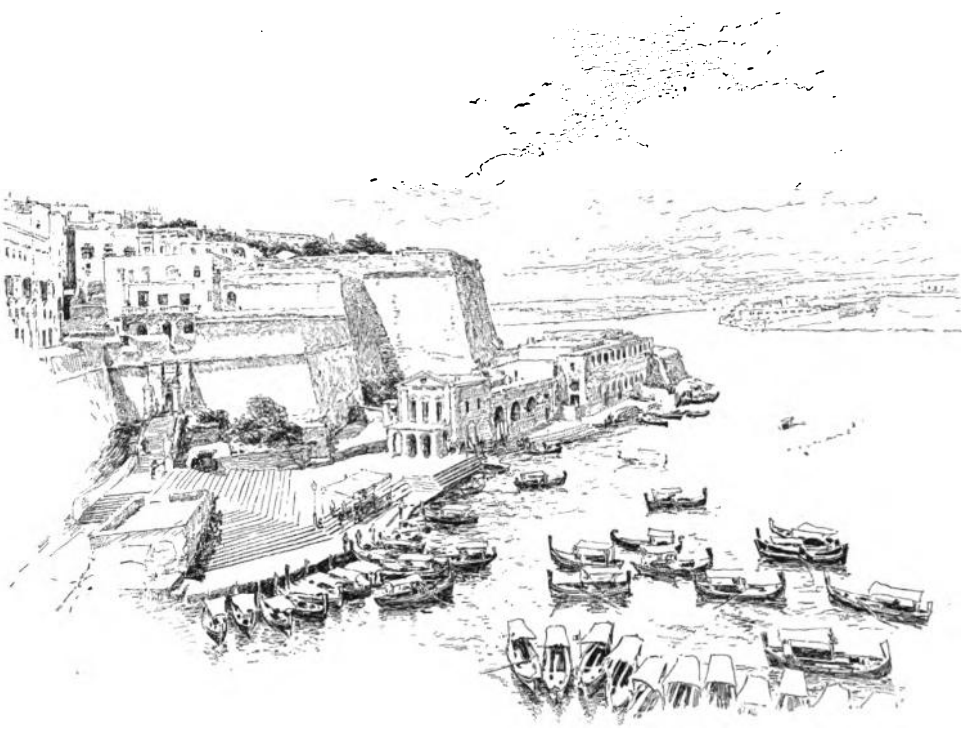
cheapest, and wood the dearer material. The climate also makes cool and even damp positions less injurious to health than in a more temperate zone, and probably the greatest hardship of the denizens of the Manderaggio is want of free circulation of air. Many projects have been formed by successive Governments for transplanting the residents in the Manderaggio, and utilising the site, but none have been found at present feasible ; one great obstacle in the way being the steady increase in



Marsamuscetto Harbour, Malta. Drawn by R. Serle.

population, which threatens ere long to constitute one of the most serious problems with which the rulers of the country will have to cope. Five and twenty years ago there were 1,248 human beings to every square mile in Malta, and the increase has become extremely serious, ten per cent., it is alleged, annually since that date. It is true that the Maltese is to be found in every country that borders on the Mediterranean, and even farther afield, where a livelihood is to be made, but, like the

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Chinaman, he desires to lay his bones at home, and having saved a small sum will invest it in buying or building a house in Sliema or San Giuseppe, or some other suburb of his beloved Valletta.

But to return to the Fior del Mondo. Had the original plan of the architect been carried out, the city would really have had an air of symmetry almost too regular. Under existing circumstances, although the streets are all at right angles, yet the inequalities on the surface of the promontory throw them into all kinds of varied perspective, and give to the whole mass a pyramidal effect which is very striking. The two highest elevations are the part of the Strada Reale between the Palace Square and the Main Gate, and the garden with its arcaded, though unroofed promenades, known as the Upper Baracca, from which the finest panorama of the Grand Harbour is obtained. At one end of this spacious elevated terrace you may look down into the vast fosse cut through the solid rock from bay to bay by the labour of thousands of Turkish slaves. Beyond is the suburb of Floriana, and in the distance the heights of Città Vecchia and the Bingemma hills, a landscape which reminds some of the visitors to these shores of the Holy Land. On the other side of the harbour, at your feet, are the twin promontories of St. Angelo and Isola, with the Admiralty creek between them crowded with British shipping, men-of-war, troopships, yachts, and merchantmen, while hundreds of *dghaisas* (native boats), and small craft of every description carry on an incessant traffic. At the other end you look across the lower Baracca, with the monument to Sir Alexander Ball, to Fort Ricasoli and the entrance to the harbour; nor must the Naval Hospital on the Bighi point be forgotten, where Napoleon announced his intention, when he had subdued England, of erecting his palace, that he might control Europe with the one hand, and India with the other.

The stately range of arches called Baracca was roofed and enlarged at the expense of Fra Balbiani, Prior of Messina in 1661—English engravings of it in that state subsequent to 1760 are extant; but in 1775, having been the rendezvous of the members of a formidable conspiracy, the roof was destroyed by order of the Grand Master. The garden contains the monument of Sir Thomas Maitland, Governor from 1813 to 1824. Passing from hence between the Castile and the fort called St. James'

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Cavalier, a garrison chapel and a gymnasium being close at hand, and turning down the Strada Mercanti past the "Italie" gateway, there stands on the opposite side of the road the present Post Office, formerly the Palazzo Parisio, occupied by Napoleon I. as his headquarters when in the island. The recess where his bed was placed, is still traditionally identified, and the late Postmaster remembered his father having related that as the dishes for the General's dinner were brought up to his room, the sentinel, with Republican equality, helped himself to a portion of one which took his fancy, much to the amazement of the young Maltese. At the corner of this street and S. Giovanni, is a handsomely ornamented building, which, rebuilt and adorned by Grand Master Pinto, was used as the Courts of Justice. At the junction of the two streets the corner is cut away and a pedestal or pillar, large enough for a single person to stand upon, occupies its place, a large iron hook projecting above. This was used for the punishment of the *strappado*, the criminal being made to stand on the pillar, and be hoisted by the arms by a rope from the hook. Popular legend asserts that a bankrupt might obtain a discharge from his debts by volunteering to undergo this penalty, if a creditor chose to exact it. On the doors of this building, now a High School for Girls, are a beautiful pair of brass knockers adorned with the armorial bearings of G. M. Pinto. Nowhere is this style of decoration more general than in Valletta. The favourite pattern is very elegant—a dolphin, beautifully modelled, and still manufactured by the metal workers, whose shops are in Strada Irlandese, near the lower Baracca. In Strada Mercanti, a little lower down, there were upon the doors of the "Archives," then the Post Office, a superb pair, so much above the common size, that a classical postmaster insisted that they represented the "Balæna Britannica delphinis major." At one time the lady of the outgoing holder of the office was returning to England, and from "information received," as the police are in the habit of saying, she was favoured with a polite message from the Governor to the effect that she would not be allowed to depart until an article of Government property, one of the knockers of the gates, was restored to its place. She no doubt had anticipated that if she could only get it safely to London, it would adorn her own street-door, for there are a few of similar construction on houses in Mayfair and Belgravia.

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Strada Mercanti is indeed a kind of epitome of life in Malta. In the vicinity of the market from which the street takes its name—a modern, convenient, and well-ordered building—may be seen specimens of every class of the population, native and visitor. Ships' cooks, caterers for messes, clubs, and hotels, with native representatives of every grade from the palace to the cottage. Outside, an open air collection of stalls offering second-hand goods of every description, besieged by a motley crowd of Greeks, Arabs, Negroes, &c., from the merchant vessels in harbour, every one chaffering in his own language, and traders, porters, and idlers generally, shouting at the top of their voices in guttural vernacular chorus. Greater interest however attaches to the seaward end of this street, for it is here that the great hospital of the Order still subsists in the original building, though improved by modern science, which was erected for the service of the sick in 1575.

When the Knights arrived on the island they found an ancient hospital at Città Vecchia. This having been entirely rebuilt and reorganized by G. M. Manoel del Vilhena, is now used for the accommodation of a small number of patients, under the title of Santo Spirito. As St. Angelo was henceforth to be the *chef lieu* of the Order a hospital was erected in the Borgo, of which the doorway still remains, the building being now a nunnery. In the chapel however there is an interesting painting dated 1557, with the arms of L'Isle Adam and the date of the foundation, 1533. On the completion of the new city this hospital was transferred to the other side of the harbour, and unfortunately placed on the south-eastern sea-front close to the great harbour, the inducement no doubt to choose this site being that patients might be landed from ships at the mouth of the harbour and brought in by a covered way below the sea-wall into the lower ward of the hospital, without making a tedious and dangerous circuit of the streets. Unfortunately it is thus completely sheltered by the high ground behind it from the healthy north and north-west winds, while it is exposed to the enervating scirocco.

This is much to be regretted, as the great ward is a stupendous piece of architectural skill. It is 503 ft. in length internally, 34 ft. 10 in. in width, and 30 ft. 6 in. in height—one of the grandest interiors in the world. There is another apartment at right angles, forming part of the

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same great hall, but now divided, as is the hall itself, by party-walls about 12 ft. high. All down the sea side of the apartment are little niches, one to every pair of beds, originally intended for latrines. Up

Knights Hospitallers, from an Engraving in "Statutes of the Order of St. John," translated by Bogoforte, 1676.

to 1863 the windows were very small, occupying only a fifteenth of the space proportionate to the contents of the hall. Even now the apartment is very dismal, and we no longer hang the walls with tapestry and

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pictures, as the Knights did by way of relieving the monotony of the prospect. The soldiers dislike and dread to be sent there, and we ought to have a military hospital in a better situation.

But the fault lay in the ignorance of true sanitary science which prevailed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1662, and again in 1712 under Perellos, large sums were spent upon the improvement of the hospital, but the erection of a front quadrangle facing Strada Mercanti, at an elevation of thirty-five feet above the existing one, shut out more completely air and light from the buildings on the lower level, and in 1780 a very injudicious addition of some rooms, afterwards used as Government stores, was made. Howard visited it in 1786 and speaks with much disfavour of the management; the servants were dirty, inhuman wretches, the beds not clean, the plate—for the hospital was supposed to be served on silver, only the *gente di catena*, the malefactors or galley slaves, condescending to pewter—badly kept, and the number of attendants below the stated staff. Possibly the Grand Hospitaller, who was always a Knight of the French langue, may have been at that time inefficient; for it is suggestive that every five years, the period for which the Knight who had been nominated was bound to serve, a change in the office took place. Yet we cannot believe that there was actual parsimony. In 1796 the Order were expending £6,000 a year on their hospital, when the purchasing power of money infinitely exceeded anything which we can find a parallel for. Nor at the present day does there appear to be any reluctance upon the part of the Maltese to make ample provision for the sick. The Civil Hospital, now wisely removed to a healthy site in the suburb of Floriana, is admirably conducted, and no fault save that of position can be found with the Hospital for Incurables, hard by the Military Hospital. It is beneath this building, which adjoins the burying-place of the Knights who died in hospital, and who were buried in their mantles *à bec*, with the white cross, that the singular piece of ghastly ingenuity, the Chapel of Bones, is situate, every detail of the architecture being rendered in the bleached remains of humanity. Almost as singular a relic is the mortuary where the body is left for twenty-four hours after death with straps fastened to hands and feet, so that the slightest motion would set a bell ringing and prevent the catastrophe of a living interment.

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V

VALLETTA (continued)

It is to Spanish influence that Valletta owes the leading characteristic of its architecture, the balconies which project from every house, forming an integral part of its construction, roofed in, and provided with windows and blinds for the purpose of intercepting the rays of the sun, and of controlling the currents of air which in sultry days are admitted to refresh the interior apartment. They are indeed the Spanish *miradores*, a modification of the Oriental *moncharbis*, supported upon solid brackets of stone and closed with gratings. In traversing the streets which lead to the centre of the town, the steep incline of Strada Vescovo from the quarantine harbour, or the streets of stairs upon the other side, these balconies present a broken outline of the most varied character, the street itself bathed in shadow with bars of light breaking in at the intersecting thoroughfares ; the gloomy shops and basements darkened by awnings or deep projections ; statues of saints foreshortened by their elevated position, hang suspended overhead with lighted lamps burning in front of them, while higher still the bright sunshine brings out in strong relief the cream-coloured upper stories of the buildings against the azure sky. As you pursue your way you notice the vaulted vestibules admitting to the court-yards of mansions, sometimes closed by folding doors with a wicket for entrance, sometimes by a high wooden gate, the object of which is to keep out the goats, a flock of which creatures may often be seen dawdling down the streets, supplementing the scanty forage they can find on the ramparts, by nibbling orange peel, old newspapers, or any refuse they espy. Behind them comes their herdsman in half seafaring guise, with bare feet, sash, long drooping knitted cap, shirt-sleeves, and a bag, for the most part empty, over one shoulder, who will suddenly pounce upon a goat, catch it by the hind leg, and milk it deftly into the can which some maidservant has just

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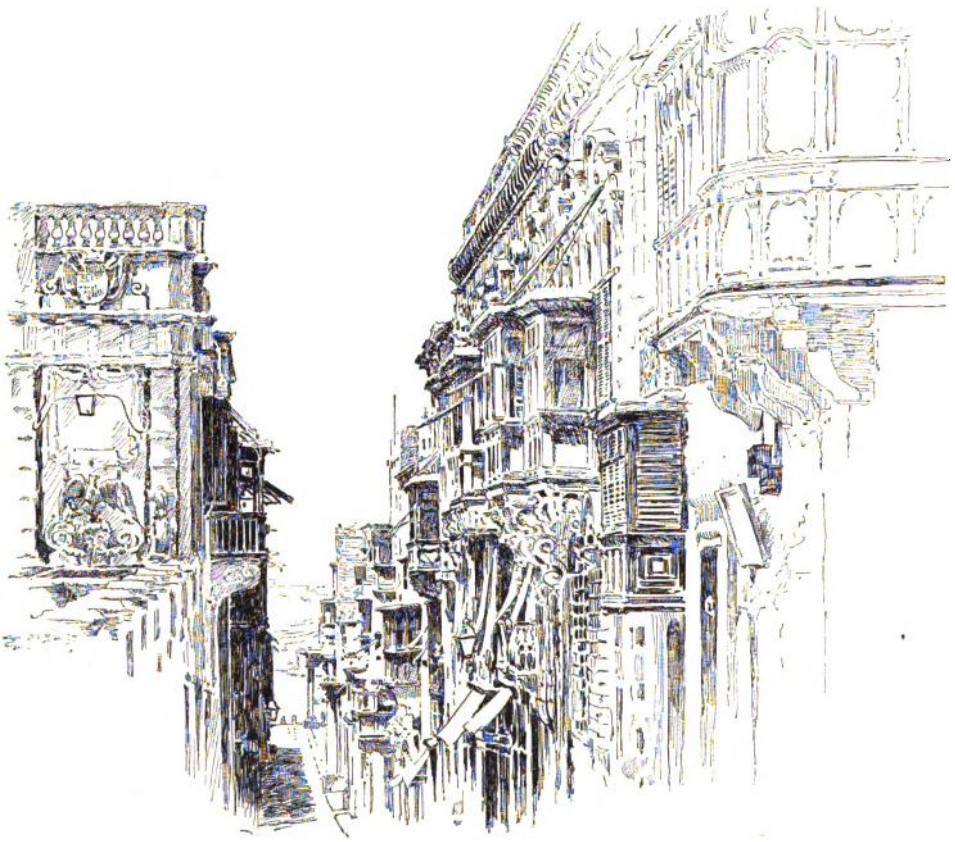
handed to him. These are the touches of nature which make daily life in Malta so amusing. The plan of a Maltese town house is this : a corridor leading to the street, a court-yard, sometimes planted with flowers or shrubs, sometimes simply paved for kitchen purposes—always with a well—used or unused. At the back the kitchen and servants'



Strada Vescovo, Valletta. Drawn by R. Serle.

offices, the front rooms on the level of the street being generally let as shops, stables, anything, to a separate tenant. There is always a mezzanine floor also, with a distinct entrance and tenancy ; these apartments have no chimneys or ventilation of any sort except from the front, and should any cooking be required by their occupants it is

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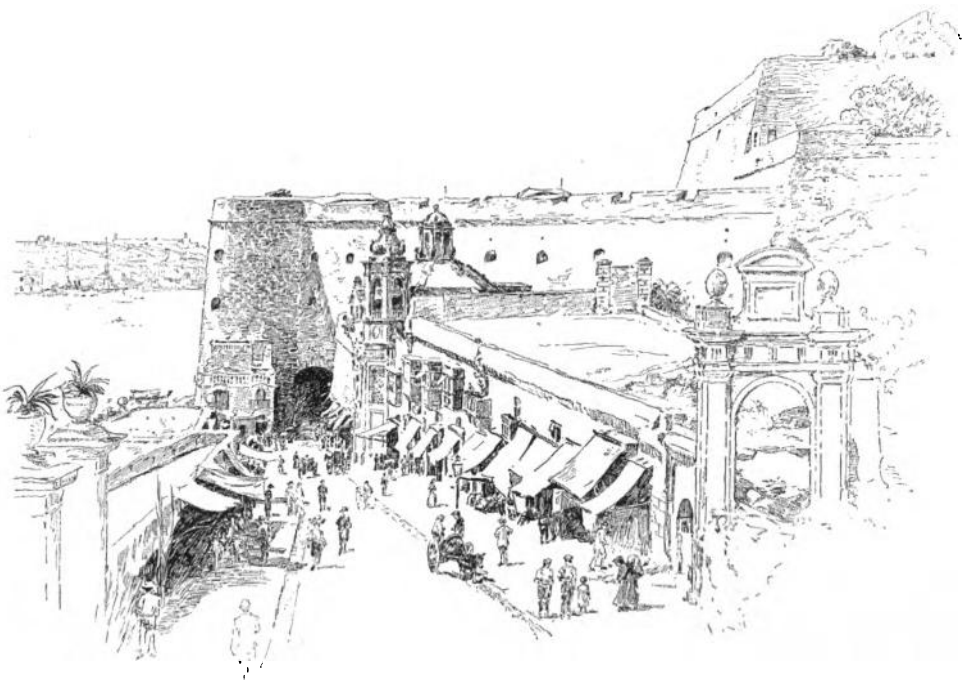
done by a little square stone oven brought out into the balcony or the pavement, filled with charcoal and lighted *sub dio*, the fumes ascending to the apartments above, which, approached by a broad handsome stairway, are often palatial in dimensions, on an average eighteen feet high, and all with stone floors. All the wood in a house in Valletta, except window cases, shutters, and doors, is comprised in the massive beams which support these slabs of stone, so fires are very rare. The old Teatro Manoel, built by G. M. del Vilhena in 1732, is the oldest



Strada Marina, Valletta. Drawn by R. Sorle.

theatre in Europe, every other, even the more modern Opera House in Valletta itself, having suffered from fire. The Opera, though the stage, the roof, and all the internal fittings were consumed in 1873, remains externally the same as when erected in 1866. The houses of Valletta have stone and concrete roofs also, upon which the occupants climb to take the air, and enjoy the lovely sea prospect to the northward in the most advantageous light with the sun behind them.

As ought to be the case, the palace is quite the typical mansion of the

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city. The courts are large and beautifully adorned with trees and shrubs, on the ground floor are the printing establishment and other government offices, guard-rooms, and the like, and you wind up a wonderful circular stair of shallow steps, a careful restoration of the one which in 1788 elicited the eulogium of Howard, to the wide marble corridors and spacious saloons appropriated to the social functions presided over by the Queen's representative. Not that this story is altogether devoted to purposes of mere court pageantry or official dignity : the room in which the grand tapestry, designated *Tenture des Indes*, is placed, is used as the House of Assembly for the local Parliament, and resounds to the harangues of patriotic members who evince their nationality by using a foreign language, Italian—which also by a strange perversity has been retained in the Courts of Justice of the island. The commercial classes, the artizans, and the labourers, would much prefer the general use of English as a supplement to Maltese, and the discontinuance of Italian. Under present conditions the trilingual teaching in the schools deserves the highest commendation, and the ease with which it seems to be acquired, speaks strongly for the aptitude of the scholars ; but why a certain official patronage should be extended to an exotic tongue is difficult to understand. Whether a dialect of the old Punic tongue or a corrupt Arabic is the origin of the native language may perhaps be doubtful, but it would repay a more careful grammatical study.

Except for the beautiful hangings of its walls the council chamber is not a particularly imposing apartment, though of good proportions. A chair of state for the representative of Majesty, seats for the officials, and benches for the elected members, covered in orthodox crimson, constitute its furniture, with a few forms at the lower end for the public, who can gratify ear or eye *ad libitum*, and when tired of the discussion revert to the figures of birds and beasts, Indians, and Negroes, wrought in superb colouring into these triumphs of the skill of Le Blond, for their mental refreshment.

It would appear that G. M. Raymond de Perellos had a passion for tapestry, for, having adorned the church of St. John with this kind of decoration made at Brussels, he repaired to the famous factory of Gobelins for tapestry for the palace. The panels represent exotic and rare South American plants and animals, the designs having been composed in the

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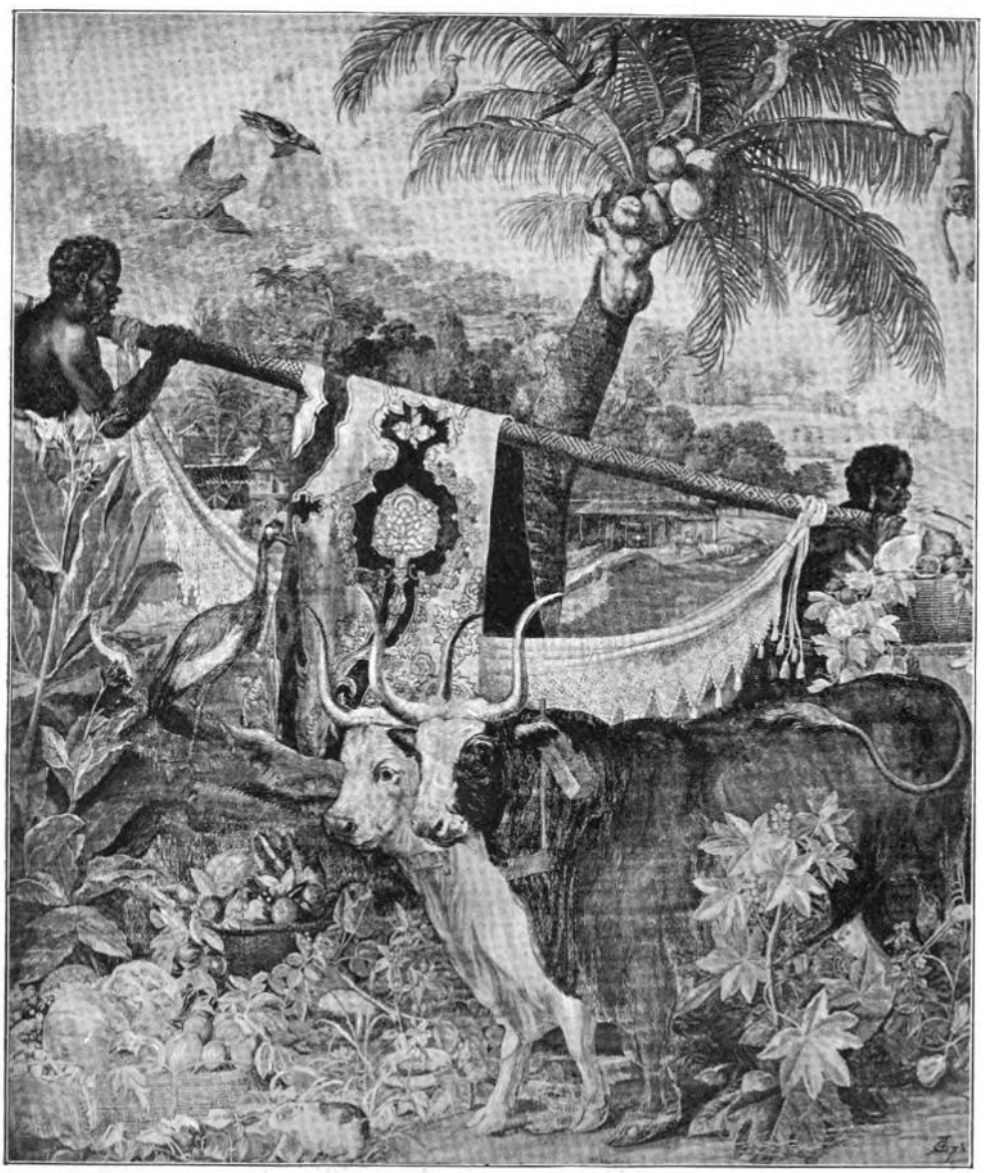
school of Le Brun, the designer for the factory of the Gobelins, in the seventeenth century, from pictures given to Louis XIV. by the Prince of



Tapestry in the Council Chamber.

Nassau. The cartoons, worn out by use, were renewed about 1725 by Francis Desportes, who modified and amplified some of them; several

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versions of these favourite designs are known to exist, of which one is in the *Garde Meuble* of Paris, and is occasionally exhibited at the opening of the Salon in the Champs Elysées. The tapestry at Malta belongs, however, to the more ancient period, the name of the maker, Le Blond, is woven into the list, and on the border appear the arms of Perellos, while on a fringe, also worked in panels, apparently by the same hand, the arms are repeated with Turkish prisoners as supporters, no memorandum of such design being found by M. Darcel in the Archives, either of the factory or of the *Garde Meuble*. He surmises therefore that these tapestries were purchased by the Grand Master from Le Blond's private establishment, where he is known to have executed commissions from favourite patterns, sometimes those belonging to the Royal establishment, and sometimes his own property—the *Tenture des Indes* being one of these—woven outside the government factory, but from designs by the same artists, and probably with materials identical with those employed for the tapestry produced from the looms of the State. M. Darcel, in the interesting monograph which he has written upon these tapestries, comments very shrewdly upon the total ignorance often displayed on such subjects, mentioning one author upon Malta who uses for these hangings the words "*i damaschi effigiati*," the figured damasks: a blunder the more extraordinary because they are commonly known in Valletta as the Arazzi, from the town of Arras, the great seat of the manufacture, which as readers of Shakespeare will remember, gave them the same name in ordinary English parlance.

One of the prominent features of the palace is the armoury, a finely proportioned gallery, lined, as are the corridors, with effigies in suits of armour bearing pikes and round shields, upon which in questionable taste are painted the arms of the successive Grand Masters from Gerard to Hompesch, and of English Governors to the present day. The armour itself is poor, and of the least interesting period. There are a few suits of more elegant design in the saloons, one of which, richly inlaid with gold, belonged to G. M. de Vignacourt, of whom there is a fine portrait by Caravaggio. There is rather an interesting full length of Catherine II. of Russia, but the majority of the portraits and other paintings are of no very conspicuous merit.

The stands of arms are effective as a mass, from a decorative point

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Tapestry in the Council Chamber.

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of view, but in detail are not of great value or curiosity. The sword, axe, and coat of mail of the great enemy of the Knights, the corsair Dragut, are preserved in a case, and a few Oriental weapons are deserving of notice; a cannon made of copper, four inches in bore, covered with cement bound round with rope, is one of the most singular trophies, and there are other small pieces of artillery of ornamental workmanship preserved here. In 1888 the English Government restored to Malta certain cannon captured from the French, who had taken them from the island; these, which are of elegant design and ornamentation, were, for the most part, originally presented by foreign princes in token of amity, or by way of acknowledgment for hospitality or services rendered by the Order. They are placed in conspicuous situations in Valletta, and form, says a late visitor to Malta, popular hobby-horses for the ragged urchins of the town.

Communicating with the palace by a prolonged balcony of the construction already described, is the Public Library, to which the ordinary entrance is by a staircase from Victoria Square, now appropriately adorned by a statue of Her Most Gracious Majesty, replacing one of G. M. Manoel del Vilhena, which had been translated by Sir Gaspard Le Marchant from the fort which the Grand Master constructed and called by his own name, ignoring an inscription which stated that he stood in the midst of his works. The building was erected by G. M. de Rohan for a library, but was not used until 1812. The library itself dates from 1650, when a room in the building adjoining St. John's Church was set apart for the purpose, which appears to have been first contemplated nearly forty years before. In 1760 the books collected by Cardinal Portocarrero were bought for a public library by the Bailiff Tencin, and in 1763 a librarian was appointed; additions were also made from other libraries over which the Order had control, and from the private collections of its individual members, which by a resolution of the Chapter were directed to be handed over to the library, the duplicate books being sold to defray establishment expenses. Thus in 1812 there were 30,000 volumes to be placed on the new shelves, and since that date 20,000 more have been added. This does not, unfortunately, represent the actual state of the library, which we may regret to learn does

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not reflect much credit upon the English Government. In 1881, when Dr. Vassalo, a learned, courteous, and in every way admirable librarian, had in the course of nature to leave his post, a very considerable percentage of the books were reduced to a condition not far removed from absolute powder by the ravages of the *agaricus* and other insect foes of literature. The sum allowed for dusting the books, taking each book in order, would suffice for a septennial cleansing; the floor of the large book-room, instead of marble, wood, or some material which resists wear and tear, was of the friable native stone, and the dust from the streets made its way through the casements; nor, said the authorities, was there a sufficient fund at hand to remedy this melancholy state of things. Dr. Vassalo's successor grappled to the best of his ability with the disastrous condition of his charge; large quantities of the volumes were committed to the flames, and the remaining works were fumigated and otherwise defended against the foe; fortunately the devastation had been chiefly confined to the upper shelves, the depository of the additions made from the libraries of bygone Knights, which, as Thackeray astutely noted when he passed through Malta, were "none of your works of modern science, travel, and history, but good old useless books of the last two centuries"; but the pest was fast spreading to works of far more interest and value, so that even now, when matters are certainly in a greatly improved condition, one asks for an ancient chronicle, or a fine specimen of typography or binding, with fear and trembling. When we consider that the outlay of a few hundred pounds, and a comparatively simple rearrangement of premises by no means inadequate for their purpose, would convert this into one of the most interesting and handsome museums in the world, one cannot but regret that local aversion to change, and the short tenure of the office of Governor, which prevents many plans from being brought to fruition which have been commenced in a true spirit of conservative reform, should have stood in the way of a thorough renovation of a most interesting inheritance of the past.

It is at the back of this building that the small museum is located in two or three minor apartments. Small as it is, however, it con-

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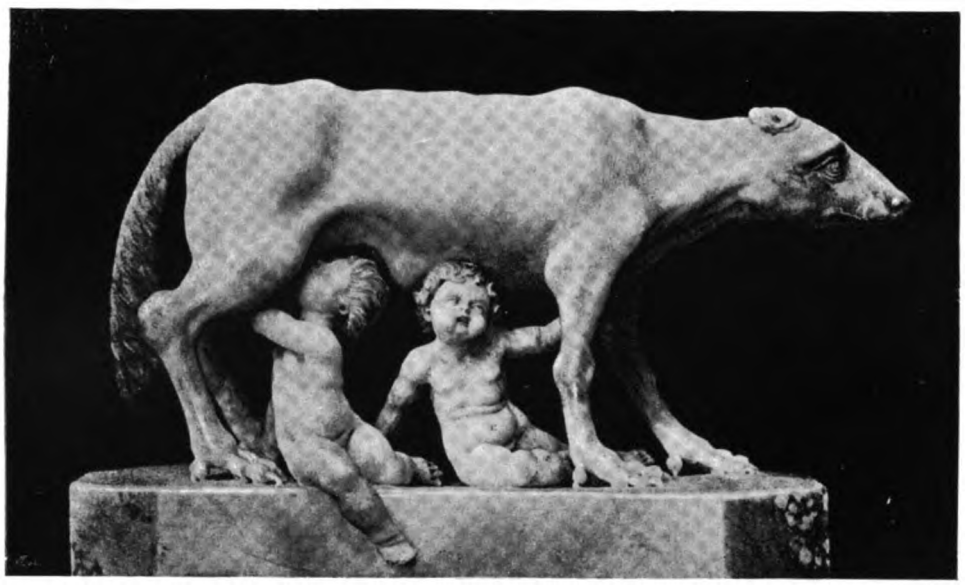
tains many objects of great value and rarity, forming an epitome of the history of the islands of Malta and Gozo. In addition to the remains of the Phœnician period of which mention has been already made, there are several pieces of pottery, vases, bowls, and lamps: there is also a most interesting terra-cotta sarcophagus of that period, found with a skeleton inside, and an iron ring, at Ghar Barca in 1797. In the same locality similar discoveries are recorded to have been made in 1624 and 1800; and fictile relics have been at times



Roman Sculpture.—Romulus and Remus. In the Museum at Valletta.

unearthed in other places which found their way into private hands, and have been lost sight of. The suggestion cannot fail to present itself that if the museum were a little more *en évidence*, public interest in it might be aroused, and some of the treasures now in private houses find their way into the national collection. The late Dr. Vassalo printed a very readable and accurate description of the contents of the museum, classifying them according to the period and region of art to which they belonged. From Phœnician and Egyptian, we come to the Greek and Roman periods; of the former, the curious Sicilian altar with the three bended legs familiar as the ensign of the Isle of Man, but with the

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addition of a human face in the centre of them ; a beautifully sculptured miniature Hercules ; several vases with figures in the Etruscan style round the bowl—of the latter the fine she-wolf with the children, of pure alabaster, are very noteworthy ; also a great variety of lamps and articles of pottery bearing Christian emblems, and the remarkable bronze statuette of a crippled beggar holding a dish and bearing on his body curious letters, said to be of the mystic alphabet in vogue among the Gnostic heretics, and read thus, " Christ was scourged." Of the Norman period there is only a capital from a small column, formerly part of a well in the

Norman Capital, and Greek Vase.

Figure with Gnostic Inscription.

In the Museum at Valletta.

Borgo, and a very curious and interesting Saracenic inscription of the eleventh century, cut upon the back of a piece of marble which had formed, it would appear from the remains of the carving on the reverse side, a portion of some ornament of a classical building. The masks, taken after death, of L'Isle Adam and La Vallette, have found an appropriate resting-place here, and the dies for the coinage of the three last Grand Masters conclude the representative tale of centuries. The very handsome majolica vases once used in the Knights' Hospital are not deposited, as one would expect, in the museum, but in the armoury and corridors of the palace. They are very quaint in design and some are of great beauty ; one of the most singular stands quite three feet in height, and is made to represent an owl with ears and beak, the head taking off for a lid.

In cases in the main library are preserved some of the most valuable

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printed books, old editions curious in woodcuts like Cavorsin's siege of Rhodes, &c. ; also some beautifully written and illuminated MS. books with splendid artistic and elaborate specimens of binding, generally presentations to Grand Masters ; there are other MSS., heraldic, &c., and engravings of Malta in former days, recently acquired.

A collection of fossils in the same great hall seems less in place here than it would be at the University in Strada S. Paolo, where the higher education of the place is very efficiently carried out, the only matter of regret being that of the numerous young men annually qualified in law and medicine a small proportion only can possibly find employment in so limited a sphere. The managing body of the institution however wisely seek to elevate the popular taste generally by lectures upon history, geography, the rudiments of science, &c., and do a good work outside their walls as well as within them.

In the educational language of the day, the elementary schools of the island may be classed as "efficient, but not sufficient." They do not possess accommodation for those of the population who would voluntarily attend them, and anything like compulsory attendance would necessitate an enlargement to triple the present available space. At the same time, for those fortunate enough to obtain it, the instruction is sound and intelligent, and the discipline admirable. One of the prettiest sights in Valletta is to visit the model school in the Strada Cristofero, where the ancient slave and civil prisons, of which Howard has left us a melancholy account, are now tenanted by little learners as bright, clean, and happy as those whom Thackeray saw and heard at Dundalk, and described so touchingly in his *Irish Sketch-book*. If an English visitor to Malta really wishes to do good, let him obtain permission from the Director of Education to visit these schools, which, I doubt not, he will find doing the same good work as in '91, and by whose conductors a slight encouragement from England is highly appreciated.

The religious susceptibilities of the natives are sometimes the occasion of external manifestation of distaste or misunderstanding, as a worthy chaplain to the forces once discovered who excited vehement wrath in the breast of a boatman by telling him that the figure of Neptune upon his *dghaisa* was the god of the sea. Like all primitive races the islanders are deeply attached to their national usages, for which perhaps

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our own countrymen sometimes display a want of consideration. One of the most remarkable features of the city is the peculiar mantilla of black silk worn by the women which is called the *faldette* or sometimes the *onega*. It is in the shape of a skirt turned over the head, which was no doubt its origin, but gathered in on one side only and kept stiff by an arched piece of whalebone, which can be managed ingeniously by the hand so as to give the nun-like effect which strikes the visitor as so remarkable. This is connected with some religious scruple; the ladies of the first fashion wear it on certain occasions of devotion, and a servant going to England with her employer's family will go on board the packet wearing it and commit it to the care of a friend to take ashore, who will meet her with it on her return. It is most probable however that the colour, not the shape, was really the subject of the vow. In the country it is worn of ordinary stuff, and called *tsolkâna*, resembling in fact an Arab garment of somewhat similar name. Perhaps the only male piece of costume which can be called national is the *khorg*, a piece of cloth made into a bag about three yards long and two feet wide, with an opening in the middle and worn full or empty over the shoulder. This forms an invariable adjunct to the out-of-door costume of the labourer, who runs in to his work in Valletta from some *casal* perhaps half a dozen miles away. A large portion of this labour is employed in the coaling of steamers, and it is one of the sights of the harbour to watch the two streams of human ants running out from the depôts and back again from the boats, laden and empty. There may be some ground for fear, should the improvements in science in any way interfere with this employment by enabling steamers to coal less frequently, that an industrious race may suffer.

That the island could support a population increasing at the present rate, if deprived of the English expenditure, is quite impossible, the fertile ground being so small, consisting only of nooks and crannies. The pits in front of St. Elmo and on the rocky plain of Floriana, in which a store of corn is kept, covered in the antique style with round stones sealed and marked, evidence the necessity for an extraneous supply. It seems strange that in a community under British influence a duty on imported wheat should still be payable,

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but it is the indisposition of the Maltese themselves to its abolition which retains the impost, nor can it be said that the price of bread has ever been so high as to cause any widespread distress as long as employment is plentiful; the wants of a native are few, and so modest is his expenditure that we still coin the "grain," a little copper piece, ten making a penny, which has been the common circulating medium ever since the era of the Grand Masters.

The effects of British rule are more in evidence on the other side of the Great Harbour, in what are called the three cities, Vittoriosa, Burmola, and Isola. On the point opposite the Knights' Hospital, Bighi, in the very place where Napoleon boastfully said he would build his palace when Europe, Asia, and Africa were all subjugated to his Empire, is the very spacious and beautiful Naval Hospital, erected in 1830, in digging the foundations of which Captain (afterwards Sir Harry) Smith, R.E., discovered the Egyptian inscriptions now in the British Museum. Here begin the defensive lines called Cottonera, after their founder, Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner, whose bust ornaments the Zabbar gate, the scene of some fighting during the French blockade, conspicuous from its lofty position. Here, in the airiest situation, stands the main military hospital, plain, large, and well-arranged. Vittoriosa, for so has the Borgo been entitled since the siege, is now one vast congeries of naval institutions; even the caves at the back of the Admiralty, where the wretched Mahometan galley-slaves dragged out a miserable existence, a suggestive trace of which is found in the appellation of the neighbouring creek, the Bay of Insects, are utilized for shops and stores. The suburb of Burmola, at the head of this creek, is densely peopled by workmen employed in the docks, which now are being enlarged on a suitable scale to the requirements of our Mediterranean headquarters. The third of these subsidiary towns, Isola or Senglea, is also now nearly as much a dockyard as the Admiralty Creek itself, and the buildings in all three, which were raised for the accommodation of the forces of the Knights, military and naval, have been modernised into or supplanted by barracks, quarters, and factories appropriated to the service of the British fleet and garrison. On the adjacent hill is a military and a civil prison, and government stores occupy the shore of the whole of this portion of the harbour on the

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other side of Valletta. Beyond the Marsamuscetto harbour and the little bay of St. Julian, are the spacious barracks designated Pembroke Camp, with shooting-ranges for musketry practice.

Thus Valletta is a capital city, a garrison town, and a naval arsenal of the first magnitude. Yet it speaks volumes for the character of the Maltese that the dangerous classes are far from being numerous; vice is nowhere prominent, order reigns unbroken; and except during the Carnival and at Easter, even the natural love of noise inherent in the population seems to go to sleep with the setting sun. It must be acknowledged that the noises in Malta form a distinct drawback to the visitors' pleasure, the church bells for instance are of fine metal and good proportions, but are nearly all fixtures, sometimes in a turret which would not allow of their being swung, but in almost every case only sounded by pulling a rope attached to the clapper or by beating the outside of a bell with a hammer. This, however, at some seasons, is incessant. The clocks also have a provoking habit of announcing the hour at every quarter, and as some of them strike Italian fashion up to twenty-four, their reminders of the flight of time grow rather wearisome. It is quite delightful to hear the bells of the English church of St. Paul chime in home fashion for service.

Although the rule of the Order of St. John conferred many substantial benefits upon the natives, its character at best was that of a benevolent despotism. Despotic indeed were the dominant caste who compelled a native to stand off the pavement when he saw a Knight approaching, and forbade a woman of any degree to appear in the Strada Reale, the main street of Valletta. Yet their rule was beneficial; irrespective of the direct charities which they maintained—hospitals for the sick, for women, for orphans, poor children, and foundlings, gratuitous dispensaries and distribution of food, in which purposes in 1796 they spent nearly £13,000—large tracts of country were planted with trees, the greatest possible benefit to the island, though viewed with distrust by Maltese to this day, who think they harbour mosquitoes and banditti. G. M. de Vignacourt in 1614 completed an aqueduct for Valletta, and Pinto a century later cultivated mulberry trees for the production of silk; scarce a Grand Master can be named who did not do something for the general welfare of the commonalty.

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Thus the people throve, while luxury and aristocratic pomp sapped the energy of the members of the Order. For many years the galleys scoured the Mediterranean in pursuit of the corsairs, but Perellos in 1697 substituted for them decked ships of a larger size, and the navy seems gradually to have declined; during the eighteenth century it became the custom to permit privateers to rendezvous in the harbours of Valletta, and from the memoirs of the Earl of Charlemont in 1750 we learn that the warfare which used to be carried on by the Knights had fallen into the hands of Captain Fortunatus Wright and other adventurers. Yet it is pleasant to remember that almost the last duty performed by the fleet of the Order was to carry succour to the Italian and Sicilian sufferers by the earthquake of 1783.

The internal dissensions, which had always served to cripple the exertions of the Order, became much more serious when the French Revolution deprived them at one swoop of revenue to the amount of £50,000. The contagion spread through the commanderies in the other European countries, and despite the conversion of plate into money, and every expedient which insolvency suggests, the Grand Master had reached the end of his resources, and the Knights were prepared to take any desperate step to secure their individual safety. Nevertheless, had it depended upon the loyal Maltese, the annexation of Malta by the French in 1798 would only have been effected at the cost of much blood and treasure. "It was well," said one of Napoleon's lieutenants, as they viewed the stupendous fortifications, "that we had somebody to hand us the keys of these gates, or we should have had some trouble in forcing our way in." At the very last moment, when treachery and pusillanimity had admitted the invader, the native militia who garrisoned the two forts in Valletta, known as the Cavaliers of St. John and St. James, were with the utmost difficulty persuaded to surrender them without an independent struggle, and as soon as the main body of the French army had departed, although it carried with it the principal part of the Maltese regular troops, the natives rose, as they declared they would, against the plunderers of their churches, and unassisted by any foreign power shut up the 3,000 Frenchmen left behind within the fortifications of Valletta. This was on the 3rd September, 1798, and for two years the patriotic islanders made every effort to

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take the city, with such small assistance as could be spared by Nelson and the English and Neapolitan Governments. Disease and famine prevailed among the unfortunates who had been left in the city, and in fact the island generally, and the loss of the Maltese during the struggle is computed to have been 20,000. Towards the end of the siege, in which the English had gradually become the allies and confidants of the Maltese, Sir Alexander Ball, one of Nelson's lieutenants, was elected Governor, and suggested a British protectorate. According to the treaty of Amiens the Order of St. John was to be revived under certain conditions and limitations, and the English troops were to evacuate the island in three months. This was so little to the taste of the Maltese that a deputation was despatched to London to protest against the proposal, and to solicit the English to remain in the country. When war broke out again, very shortly, the British were still in Malta, where they remained until, in 1814, the Treaty of Paris ratified that sentence which remains engraven on the Main Guard, "The love of the Maltese and the voice of Europe confirms these islands to great and invincible Britain"; and (adds a candid foreign critic) "I think that the Maltese have no cause to repent the consequences of that love."

THE END

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